

# GURU NANAK

AND

## His Japji

PARKASH SINGH



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In Commemoration of the Quincentenary Celebration of Guru Nanak Dev

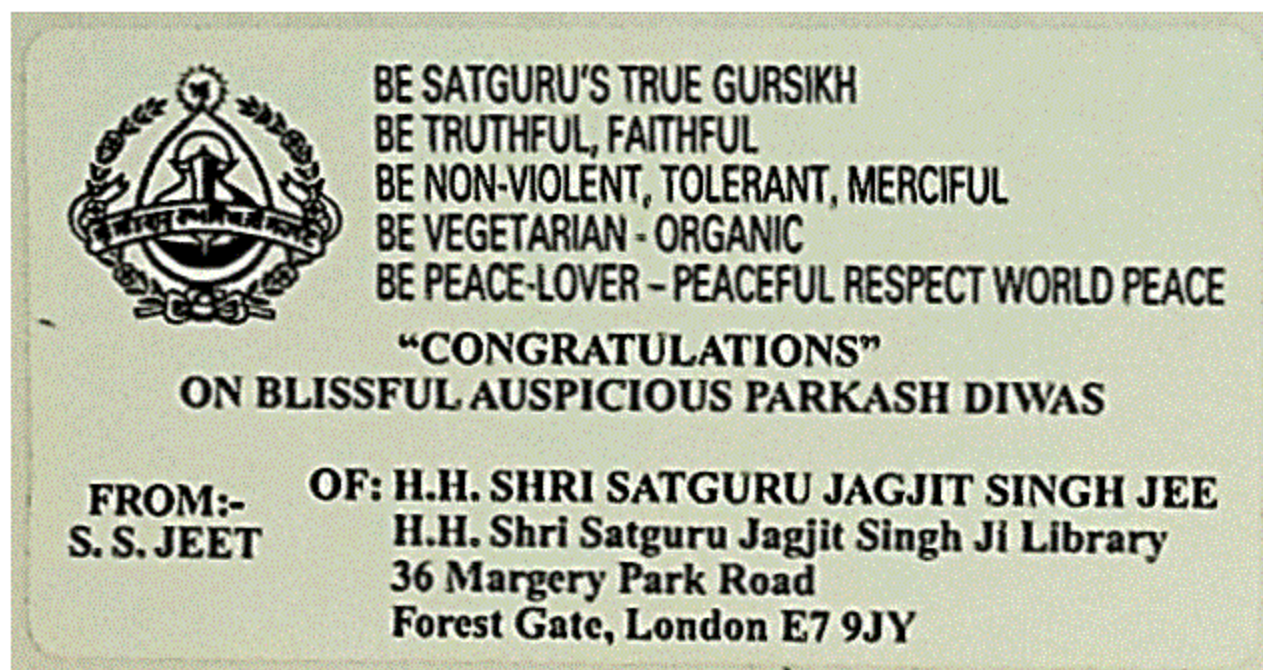
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# GURU NANAK AND HIS JAPJI

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*In Commemoration of*

**The Quincentenary Celebration of Guru Nanak Dev**

**1969**

*Published by*

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## FOREWARD

The first date in the History of Sikh Religion is 1469 A.D., the year in which Guru Nanak, founder of this 'Living Faith' was born. 1969 is a memorable year, as in this year the Sikh Religion has become five centuries old, when the Great Guru's Quincentenary is being celebrated all over the world.

Guru Nanak was Great and equally great was his message of peace and love. He came in this world of sin and suffering to 'purify the fallen' and to show to mankind the Path of Blessedness.

His life and teachings are a great source of inspiration for us all, because he stood for equality, liberty and universal brotherhood.

Those who are participating in or witnessing the celebrations of the 500th Birth Anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev, are very lucky and fortunate. To contribute my humble bit in the celebrations of this Great Event and to pay my homage to the memory of the Divine Master, this book is being presented on the historic and auspicious occasion.

I have tried to depict a clear image of the Great Guru by writing, in brief, his life and teachings. An elaborate exposition of the Japji, which is the most important composition of Guru Nanak, has been given. Hence the title: "Guru Nanak and His Japji".

A translation of *Japji Sahib*, at the end, is by the late Professor Puran Singh, and it has been selected because it is one of the best. This translation is closer to the original text than many other translations are, as it conveys more the sense and feeling of Japji than its literal meaning.

I am thankful to all those philanthropists and the authorities of the religious and educational institutions, who are distributing complimentary copies of this book in thousands. I also thank my friend, Dr. W. H. McLeod who has not only read the proofs but has also given some useful suggestions.

*Parkash Singh*

Sikh History Research Department,  
Khalsa College, Amritsar.  
April 5, 1969.



## **HUMBLE DEDICATION**

○ SAT GURU ! WHAT MAYEST I, THY HUMBLE SERVANT

DEDICATE TO THEE,

WHEN ALL, IN THY MERCY AND KINDNESS IS

BESTOWED ON ME BY THEE.



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## INDIA AT THE TIME OF GURU NANAK

Five hundred years ago, Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism, was born. He came at a critical time in India's history. India was then passing through a period of great turmoil and political upheaval, resulting in great bloodshed, tyranny and terrible suffering, and in social, moral, religious and political degredation. India was slipping fast into the hands of the mighty Moghuls. Hindus and Muslims were bitterly opposed to one another. The mild Hindu despised the Mohammedan as an untouchable, and the sturdy Mussalman looked down upon the Hindu as a *Kafir*, an infidel.

Unfortunately, the religious leaders—both *Pandits* and *Mullahs*—were of no assistance to the people. 'They could not guide them in the right direction because they were worshipping Mammon or Power and while doing so they quarrelled among themselves and were damned for ever—the circle of death and rebirths continued for them ceaselessly, without ever coming to an end,' as has been stated by Bhai Gurdas. (cf. Var I).

Some were engrossed in academic intellectualism and in the discussion of hair-splitting differences in philosophy, while others were slaves to narrow formalism, ritualism and ceremonialism. To combat these, there was a great revival of the cult of Devotion or true *Bhakti* in the 15th and 16th centuries, and many Saints seem to have taught similar doctrine all over India.



Politically the state of the people was miserable, almost beyond belief. The emperors at Delhi cared little or nothing for their welfare ; most of them held that non-Muslims were created to be the slaves of Muslim believers. Guru Nanak himself tells us that in his days 'the Kings were butchers and cannibals, officials dogs that licked the blood and devoured the flesh of the people in their power, there was none to protect the honour of the weak or the women. All was falsehood, and religion had flown away.'

"Ruthless taxation.....corruption and disorder every where rampant, the country a prey to brutal murderers and dacoits, desolated by cruelty,.....the rulers sunk in luxury and vicious debauchery"\*

## THE HINDUS

The Hindus had no unity of thought. They were not united either for action. Divided over stupid petty dynastic and personal quarrels, the peoples of India, Hindus, Buddhist and Jains, put up a very poor defence against the ruthless, hardy and energetic invaders from the Muslimised Middle East. In each province a few battles, a few secret betrayals were enough ; indigenous rulers were replaced by the foreign victors and temples by mosques. In the words of Greenlees : "Hinduism, taught non-resistance and turned the eyes of its believers to a future betterment in *Swarga*, and so led them to indifference about the miseries of life on earth. Only the Brahmins were allowed to study Scriptures written in Sanskrit. They neglected their duty to teach the spiritual realities to the masses, who sank into the most pitiable slough of superstition and materialism"\*\* Religion for them became a mere matter of special ways of eating, drinking, painting the forehead with caste-marks etc. The *Brahmins* themselves

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\* Duncan Greenlees, The Gospel of the Guru-Granth Sahib pp XX, XXI

\*\* Duncan Greenlees, Ibid, p-XVIII



were satisfied with learning their *mantras* by heart, so that they might earn a living by reciting them ; they cared little or nothing for the meaning, nor did they attempt to live according to their precepts and ideals. As a result of this 'all spirituality was buried deep.'

Women, like the low caste people, were held definitely inferior and could not attain salvation or enter heaven till they had been reborn as men of high caste. Ladies were considered to be sensual, natural tempters and spoilers of men's spiritual life—of which the first condition was their total renouncement.

## THE MUSLIMS

The Muslim rule in India was then five hundred years old. Its originators, Arabs, were followed by further streams of Muslim invaders through the North-Western mountain passes.

Majority of the Muslims themselves were also not happy. They were excessively intolerant and fanatical, to such an extent that 'some of the Muslim rulers would allow Hindus to keep only enough corn and coarse cloth for six months.' The *Mullahs* were in no way more spiritual or religious than the *Brahmins*. A common man among the Muslims ignored both the principles of the *Quran* and all the humane laws of *Shariat*.

Muslims looked upon women as play-things for their own lusts, as little better than toys or animals ; intense distrust of them made them imprison them in the four walls of their houses away from sunlight and fresh air, letting them go out only under escort and black veil (*burqa*). When a daughter was born to a family it was considered to be a dreadful calamity, so infanticide, strictly forbidden by the *Quran*, became quite common among them.

## GOD HEARD AT LAST THE PRAYERS.

“Heaven heard at last the cries (of the people)  
Guru Nanak descends on earth !  
The disciples meet him and drink the nectar of his lotus-  
feet !

In *Kaliyuga* (this dark age) we realize the Divine,  
All the people are the people of God,  
Guru Nanak makes all the castes one caste of man !  
The rich and the poor combine in one brotherhood.  
From this Founder of Humanity, a new race of love goes  
forth ;

Nanak bows down to his disciple,  
The master and the disciple are one !”

(Bhai Gurdas, Var I)



# **GURU NANAK DEV**



**THE FOUNDER OF SIKH RELIGION**

**[ His Quincentenary is being celebrated all over the world in 1969 ]**





## LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF GURU NANAK

An important part of the globe was not known to the people of both East and West, when Guru Nanak was born. The United States of America were not yet discovered. Columbus made his voyage of discovery about the time that Guru Nanak was making his preaching tours over India and the Near East. This was the time when Vasco da Gama discovered the Southern route to India and Magellan sailed around the globe. The Renaissance of European culture was reaching its peak as masterpieces were being created in the fields of art and literature.

It was a period of religious ferment also. The *Bhakti* movement in India was touching its climax and in Europe, Luther, Zwingli and Calvin were preaching reform. "Luther was translating the Bible into the vernacular, even while Guru Nanak was denouncing priestcraft, hypocrisy and idolatry and using the Punjabi vernacular instead of Sanskrit for his religious poems."\*

In the words of C.F. Potter : "Guru Nanak was a dynamic combination of Martin Luther, Dwight L. Moody and the Apostle Paul. He resembled Luther, his contemporary, for while the German was trying to reform Christianity, Nanak was doing his best to reform Hinduism. Like Moody he was an evangelist, and just as Moody's preaching in the United

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\*Dr. C.H. Lochlin, The Sikhs and their Scriptures 1963, p. 2.

States and England in the late nineteenth century was supported and supplemented by Ira D. Sankey's sweet singing, so Nanak's minstrel companion Mardana with his rebab, the oriental ancestor of the violin, was of great assistance in spreading the new faith. And like the Apostle Paul, Nanak took four long missionary journeys....."\*

## BIRTH AND CHILDHOOD

Guru Nanak was born on April 15, 1469, corresponding to *Vaisakh Sudi 3*, 1526 B.K., at Talwandi Rai Bhoi (now called Nankana Sahib), about 40 miles to the south-west of Lahore. His father, Mehta Kalu, was a *patvari* or village accountant.

There are many legends connected with his birth and childhood, of a very fascinating nature. The Guru bore upon him the imprint of greatness, and the family astrologer, who saw him soon after his birth for casting his horoscope, worshipped him with clasped hands and predicted that the child would wear the umbrella, a symbol of prophetic dignity.

The child Nanak was so handsome, so 'mysteriously fair in colour and form, with a radiance that was new to earth.' From his infancy he cast a spell that none could escape.

His sister Nanki, who was elder to him by five years, from his very childhood, saw in him the light of God. She was the very first inspired by Heaven to be his disciple. Rai Bular was the second, who had also seen that gleam of soul in Guru Nanak, which is seen only once in many centuries.

"He was a child of smiles, and his eyes were silent and wise ; he loved quiet of soul, he loved joy and thought. Whoever saw the child, or touched him accidentally, praised God. A thrill of unknown delight came to anyone who lifted the child or played with him. But none knew whence came

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\*Charles Francis Potter, *The Faiths Men Live By*, 1959 (A Cedar Special), p. 29.



to him that gladness of soul"\*

He began to talk on divine subjects at the early age of five, and understood the full significance of his language.

Nanak the child gave the signs of Nanak the Guru and Saviour at a very early age. As a boy he ate little, slept little, and shut himself in his own thoughts for days and days; and no one could understand him.

From his childhood, Guru Nanak was fond of contemplation and eagerly sought the company of holy people, *sadhus* and *faqirs* to tread the way to the Ultimate Reality.

## EDUCATION

At the age of seven Guru Nanak was sent to the village Brahmin teacher from whom he learnt reading and writing in *Devnagri*, arithmetic and book-keeping. He soon exhausted the stock of learning that his teacher possessed. He was then sent to a local Maulvi for the study of Persian and Arabic. It is also claimed that Guru Nanak studied Islamic literature from Sayyad Hassan a *dervish*\*\*. He also learnt many things on various subjects and different aspects of life, from the saints and hermits with whom he so often associated in the nearby forest.

He was deeply interested in Indian lore in general and in the writings of the contemporary *bhagats* in particular, whose teachings he compared with his own and criticised in passing.

In communion with ascetics and sages he learnt much about the problems of life. Still more did he learn from his own communion with Nature in summer's heat and winter's frost and in the glory of the firmament, in the changeful aspects of nature, as well as in the joys and sorrows of the

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\*Puran Singh, The Book of the Ten Masters, p. I.

\*\*Siyar-ul-Mutakhirin, as quoted by Teja Singh and Ganda Singh, A Short History of the Sikhs, Vol. 1 p 2 fn. 2.

inhabitants of his native village, he read in bright character and repeated with joyous iteration the Name of the Formless Creator.

His scholarly attainments were superb as shown by his erudite compositions like the *Japji*, *Asa-di-Var*, *Sidh Gosht* and *Onkar*.

During his long journeys he visited different centres of the Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist faiths and acquainted himself with their systems and thoughts.

He had philosophical discussions with learned *pandits*, *yogis*, *pirs*, and *Sufis*, whom he could always convince by his deep learning, practical wisdom, intensely sensitive and conscious mind, gentle and humble manner. But Guru Nanak spoke of himself as neither learned nor world-renouncing.

He was the essence of humility. He preached with vehemence against idolatry, hypocrisy and distinctions of castes and creeds, but in so doing he never uttered a word which savoured of personal ambition, neither did he arrogate to himself the attributes of God.

From the beginning he had a protestant and critical frame of mind. At the age of nine, when he was asked to go through the ceremony of *Yajnopavitam*, he refused to wear the sacred thread, saying that 'he would rather have a thread that would neither break nor get dirty, nor be burnt or lost'.\* He said to the priest :

Make mercy the cotton, contentment the thread,  
continence its knot, truth its twists

That would make a *janeu* (a sacred thread) for the  
soul; if thou have it, O *Brahmin*, then put it on me'\*\*.

His parents gave him money, he spent it in the service

\*Guru Nanak, *Asa-di-Var*, XV. 1

\*\*Ibid, XVI



of others. He met a *sadhu* and gave away his brass jug to him and a finger ring of gold to another.

The Guru was so much lost in God and had become so "mad on the Lord" that his mind was always fixed on Him and for some time he would do nothing but meditate on His Name and sing His praises. They suspected that he was suffering from some physical disease. Even a physician was called in to cure him of his "madness". The Guru smiled at this misconception and said :

'Physician go thy way ;  
Few know my malady.  
My body groans, because my soul is crying,  
It is not a case for thy healing.  
The Creator has given me this pain ;  
He alone can remove it.'

His father was keen to put him to some profession or trade, but all the attempts failed to take him out of his meditative mood.

### AT SULTANPUR.

Guru Nanak had times of isolation and truancy from work and play and showed little inclination to take to any professional job. But his father wanted him to settle down and work to earn a livelihood.

Worried about his son's 'mad' conduct Mehta Kalu sent him to Sultanpur where the Guru's sister, *Bibi* Nanki, lived. Her husband Jai Ram, had some good influence with the local governor, Daulat Khan Lodi, and secured a job of a store-keeper (*modi*) for Guru Nanak. He was given charge of the state granary (*modi-khana*) and he performed his duties efficiently. In spite of his perfect accounts and good management of business there were some complaints but when checked by the government officials was found faultless. His love for God became more intense than before.

He was not planning renunciation. He had a mission to fulfil, but he did not have to give up the world for the sake of it.

He was married to Sulakhani, daughter of Baba Mula of Batala at the age of nineteen years and had two sons, Sri Chand and Lakhmi Das. Guru Nanak favoured the family life over asceticism. Not only he himself was married but also he selected a disciple with a family as his successor. This emphasis on the family has resulted in social progress and the freedom Sikh women enjoy. Guru Nanak rated the householder, the worker, above the renouncer.

One morning, as usual, the Guru went to bathe at the nearby stream, called the Bein. As he dipped into the water he disappeared and hence did not come back to his home. A great search was launched for him. He had gone into a trance and communion with the Almighty Lord. He reappeared after three days when he had received from Him the message of his mission. A new lustre illumined his face. He gave away all to the poor. He mostly kept quiet and so often uttered these words : "There is no Hindu, no Mussalman." His utterance created a stir in the town and attracted many people, some with a critical reaction who lodged a complaint against him with the *Qazi* and he was summoned before the Governor to explain himself.

Guru Nanak went with his critics to the mosque, where the *Qazi* led the prayer and the local Governor joined him with others to pray. The Guru told them that their prayers were not acceptable to God, because while they were repeating their prayers by their lips their minds were wandering. He pointed out that the *Qazi* was worried about the newborn filly at his house and the Governor in his imagination had gone to Kabul to purchase some horses. The Guru then told them the qualities of a true Mussalman. All who heard him said that God spoke through him.



First he spent some time in the Punjab preaching his gospel of truth and righteousness and converted many people—both Hindus and Muslims—to his views.

He next visited Tulamba, near Multan, where he reclaimed a professional *thug*, Sajjan by name.

## THE GURU'S TASK

Out of the "wretched, misery-trampled, hag-ridden peasantry the Guru had to build a nation of self-respecting men, devoted to God and to their leader, filled with a sense of equality and brotherhood for all, ready to die, nay, eager to die, as martyrs for their faith when opportunity allowed, and yet prepared to fight the tyrant with his own weapons in defence of the weak and to protect the righteous".\*

The law-abiding and peaceful followers of the Guru had to be filled with courage, disciplined, and trained to use the sword and musket, when these were really needed. History testifies that the Sikh Gurus never fought save in self-defence, never raised the sword in anger, never forgot the noblest chivalry while fighting—and looking to the future with hope and faith instead of the blind despair of accepting meekly the effects of just their *Karmas* of earlier lives.

Guru Nanak began his work by ridiculing superstition and outer show, by tearing caste prejudices to pieces. He not only taught but lived a life of absolute brotherhood with his Sikhs and lead them to extend that relationship in a wider field. He set out, to awaken the demoralized people from their superstitious dreams and to give them new hope, bringing religion into daily life, filling the home itself with the constant thought and service of God as a personal Friend.

He preached by persuasion and personal attractiveness. He was dead against hypocrisy and formalism in religion,

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\*Duncan Greenlees, *The Gospel of the Guru-Granth Sahib*, pp XXIII, XXIV.

and was uncompromising in his total rejection of all its implication, of all feeling that woman is inferior to man.

Other reformers and saints, strove elsewhere, each in his own way as taught by his Master, but in the Punjab Guru Nanak, through the ten lives he devoted to his labours, built a nation, brave, proud and strong. He taught his followers, both men and women, how to love God as a Friend, as a most beloved Intimate. He wanted his people to be upright and self-respecting instead of prostrate on the ground. That was the spirit he infused into the Sikhs, and it transformed the whole picture of society in the North of India.

### HIS UDASIS OR TOURS

After visiting some places in the Punjab, the Guru proceeded on his long tours, called *Udasis*. The first tour was towards the East, where he visited the important religious centres of the Hindus. He visited their holy places mostly on festive occasions to avail himself of the opportunities of contacting large multitudes of people. For example, he went to Kurukshetra during the time of a big *mela* when there was a solar eclipse.

Similarly he reached Hardwar, where a large number of Hindus had assembled to have a dip in the sacred waters of the Ganges. Early in the morning he saw the devotees who were bathing in the river toss water towards the rising sun in the east as oblations to their departed ancestors. He also went into the holy river and took to throwing water to the west. The pilgrims gathered around him and asked what he was doing. He replied "My farm in the Punjab needs watering. I thought I had better do something about it." The listeners laughed at him and one of them asked "How could any one send water so many miles away?" The Guru politely replied with a smile, "If this water cannot reach my farm which is only a few hundred miles away on this very



planet, how could it reach our ancestors in the world beyond ?”

“How far are our ancestors from here ?” was a question before the pilgrims to which they had no answer.

Guru Nanak went to Benaras, where he had long discussions with a leading Hindu *pandit*, Chatur Das, on the twin topics of idol-worship and symbolism. Most of these talks were versified by the Guru in a long hymn called *Onkar* which has been preserved in the Sikh Scriptures. The *pandit* was made to realize that God resided in every human heart and that His Holy Name could be the medium of His adoration.

Guru Nanak also went to Patna and Gaya. He then reached Kamrup (Assam), where some women tried to bewitch and tempt him with their magic, wealth and beauty. But the Guru convinced them that the true charm and the real wealth lay in achieving excellence in one's character and ideals and that beauty was not for sensuous enjoyment but to touch the heights of conjugal love.

Guru Nanak and his companion Mardana entered a town where they were not well received. The Guru blessed the inhabitants, saying, “May your town flourish.” Next day they reached another town where they were welcomed warmly. While departing the Guru said, “May the good people of this town be scattered.” Mardana was astonished at the apparent injustice of the remarks concerning the inhabitants of the two towns and inquired the real meaning from his Master. The Guru replied: “The churlish inhabitants of the former town should not carry with them their evil influence to other places so they should remain where they are. But the inhabitants of the other town, on the other hand, if scattered, would spread their virtue to other places.”

After leaving Asam, the Guru went to Dacca and then to Cuttock. When he reached Puri he went to the famous temple of *Jagannath*, where *Arti* was being performed before the images. Seeing the devotees of the idols in the temple lighting lamps in silver trays to propitiate the gods, he burst into a song :

In the disc of the sky  
The sun and moon shine as lamps,  
The galaxy of stars twinkle like pearls,  
All zephyr is incense, the winds are fanning,  
All the woods are bright with flowers,  
Oh, Saviour of the World, Thine *arti* (adoration)  
is wonderful indeed. (Tagore's translation)

The Guru passed through Central India and preached his gospel of love and peace to the aboriginals who were living the life of cannibalism.

Then he came back to the Punjab, where he spent some time to visit different places of religious importance. He went to Pakpatan which was a centre of *Sufi faqirs*. There he met Sheikh Ibrahim, also known as Sheikh Brahm, who was a descendent of the famous *Sufi* mystic poet and *faqir*, *Baba Farid*.

He travelled along the river Ravi and the river Sutlej. He went to scores of different places including Dipalpur, Kangarpur, Kasur, Patti, Sultanpur, Vairoval, Jalalabad, etc. When he reached Lahore a millionaire *Khatiri*, named Duni Chand was converted by him to his fold, when the Guru exposed the futility of the *shradh* ceremony which he had arranged in memory of his father.

Before going on another long tour outside the Punjab towards the south, the Guru founded a new town, Kartarpur or the Creator's City, on a piece of land offered by a *Karori* another rich man of Lahore who became the Guru's disciple. After providing a home for his family in the new town the



Guru started on, his second itinerary this time to the south. During this long journey he travelled as far as Ceylon. There are references in some of the *Janam Sakhis* to Raja Shivnabh of Jaffna in Ceylon, who had already been introduced to the name of Guru Nanak and his doctrine by Bhai Mansukh, a disciple of the Guru, who had gone there in connection with his trade. It is said that the Raja was anxiously eager to meet the Guru.

The Sikh temples at Rameshwaram, Salur, Bhaker and Shivkanji in Tammilnadu (Madras) and at Colombo in Ceylon give some indication to the route, the Guru had adopted during his second journey. Similarly the Sikh temples at Burhanpur, Surat, Bombay, Amravati and Nirmal help us to establish that he returned to the Punjab by the western coast of India.

After spending some time with his family the Guru again started for his third journey, which was to the North. Crossing the tracts of the Lower Himalays, the Guru visited many places where the *yogis* had made their monasteries and *maths* for recluse and yogic practices.

The Guru reached Gorakhmata (now known as Nanakmata after his name), where he met some *yogis* of the Gorakh order. He had discussions with them and told them that to wear certain forms of dress and to carry some prescribed things without leading a pure and spiritual life is futile.

The Guru then traversed Nepal and some parts of Western Tibet to reach Kailash Mountain and Mansrovar Lake, where some very old *yogis* were living in caves, covered with perpetual snow. Here again the Guru had some long and interesting discussions with them. The *yogis* were astonished to find him reach those high regions and asked him how things were going in the plains below. He replied that the darkness of falsehood prevailed throughout and the moon of truth was invisible. He asked them to be of some use to the world

and tried to convince them that they should exert themselves in the service of mankind. His talk with the *Sidhas* or Master *Yogis* during this long journey and later on at Achal Batala were versified by him in his long and philosophic composition the *Sidh Gosht*.

Guru Nanak came back to Kartarpur after passing through Ladakh, Srinagar, Jammu and Sialkot.

The fourth itinerary of the Guru was to the West, when he, with his companion Mardana, visited Mecca the centre of the Muslim faith. When they arrived in the holy city the Guru felt weary and hence lay down in the mosque and fell asleep, with his feet stretched towards the *Kabah*. Some of the *hajis* (pilgrims) who noticed this were very much annoyed and they remonstrated with him. One of them even kicked him, saying, "Who are you? Why should you be so ignorant and disrespectful as to turn your feet towards the *qiblah*, the House of God, which is the Moslem Holy of Holies?" The Guru replied very calmly, "Be not so furious. Please turn my feet in a direction where God is not." The people began to ponder over this statement of the Guru, who asked them further, "In which direction after all is not the *qiblah*, since God is everywhere?" Had not the Prophet of the Muslims, Mohammad, himself said in the *Quran* the same? "Allah's is the east and the west. So whithersoever ye turn, there is the face of Allah." (cf. *Quran* ii, 116). The people questioned the Guru whether he was a Muslim or a Hindu. "Neither of the two" was his reply. Who was he then they asked and he said, "I am only a plaything made of five elements." Next they asked as to who was superior of the two. "Neither as such. For both would suffer and repent, if they had no good action to recommend them."

While returning to India the Guru stopped at Baghdad, where he met Shah Bahlol, a local Muslim Saint. There is a memorial in the name of the Guru which has an inscription



on the stone saying : "In memory of the Guru (that is) the Divine Master *Baba Nanak Faqir Aulia*, this building has been raised afresh with the help of seven Saints." The chronogram reads : "The blessed disciple has produced a spring of grace—year 927 H."\*

This date corresponds to 1520-21 A.D. The Guru returned to India within a year. He was in India when Babar invaded the Punjab for the third time, which took place in 1521 A.D. (1578 B.K) according to the Guru's own words, which are a part of *Babar Vani* (cf. *Guru Granth Sahib*, p. 722.)

The Guru was an eye-witness to the sack of Saidpur and the wholesale massacre of its inhabitants.

"How Guru Nanak anticipated the future trends of the Sikh movement is apparent from his reaction to Babar's invasion of India. His heart was deeply anguished and he described the sorrows of Indians—Hindus and Muslims alike—in accents of intense power and suffering. His hymns are charged with deep patriotic fervour. Indian literature of that period records no more vehement or virile protest against the foreign invading hordes."†

On this occasion the Guru uttered some of the most touching verses which he himself calls 'hymns of blood':—

With his wicked expedition, Babar hastens from Kabul  
and demands forced gifts.

Decency and law have vanished ; falsehood stalks abroad  
The vocation of the *Qazi* and the Brahman is gone and  
Satan performs the marriage services.

The Muslim women recite the *Quran*, and in, suffering,  
call upon their God.

So do suffer the high and low-caste Hindu women.

Pacans of murder are being sung, O Nanak and blood  
is being shed in place of saffron.

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\*Translation by Teja Singh. Ganda Singh as quoted in *A Short History of the Sikhs* Vol 1, p. 12.

†Harbans Singh, *Heritage of the Sikhs*, p. 22

In this city of corpses I sing of God's goodness, and I  
strike this note of warning.

That He Who made these people and assigned different  
places to them is witnessing it all.

That He and His decisions are just and that He will mete  
out exemplary justice

And again :

God took Khurasan under His wing and exposed India  
to the terrorism of Babar.

The Creator takes no blame unto Himself : it was the  
death that made war on us

When there was such slaughter, such groaning,

Didst Thou not feel the agony, O Lord ?

Creator, thou belonget to all.

(Translation, Harbans Singh)

At the age of fifty-two, Guru Nanak returned to settle  
down at Kartarpur where he took upon himself the duties of  
every-day life. He worked on his farm and provided for his  
family. He held congregations and recited his hymns morn-  
ing and evening. Kartarpur became the centre of the Sikh  
faith which was gradually developing the characteristics of  
an organized church. It had become a place of pilgrimage  
for thousands of his followers whom the Guru had won over  
during his travels.

In 1539, at the age of seventy, Guru Nanak passed away,  
leaving behind his spiritual successor Guru Angad, a large  
number of devotional hymns like *Japji*, *Asa-Di-Var*, *Sidh  
Gosht* and *Onkar* and also innumerable followers scattered  
all over India and in other lands.

Sadhu T. L. Vaswani once wrote : "As we recall incident  
after incident of the Guru's life, we sometimes say to our  
selves : 'Oh ! that we had the privilege his first disciples had of  
hearing his wondrous words and seeing his sacred Beauty and  
kissing his blessed feet!' We forget that he has passed into the  
Unseen only to come nearer to us in spirit. He has gone away



in order to enter into us, into the life of India, the life of the world. A beautiful Sikh belief has it that the one light passed into other Gurus. And may I be permitted to say that the one light has never vanished ? It has passed into the Sikh community. It is in each one of us. Only let us break the barriers of passion and prejudice, of separateness, sectarianism and strife. Only let us remove the obstacles, so that the Light may shine with splendour. The Nations need the Light ; civilization needs it. But the Light shines through those who develop the perceptive power of Love. Guru Nanak's call is the call of Love."\*

### GURU NANAK'S LOVE FOR MUSIC

Guru Nanak loved music. Not only the holy word but also the holy music was a Divine gift with Him, which found an echo in the hearts of the listeners when he sang. He delivered his Divine message to the people with the help of the holy music. He used to sing in the accompaniment of a six-stringed rebeck, called *rabab*, which was played by Mardana. According to Sadiq Ali Khan in his *Sarmays-i- Ishrat* this musical instrument was Guru Nanak's own invention.

Whenever the Divine inspiration came, the Guru heard the word with his musical ear and lost no time in singing it out. He so often said to his life-long companion and minstrel : "Mardana ! play the rebeck, the music of Heaven cometh."\*\*

He sang in wondrous ecstasy and could listen to an infinite number of musical measures being played on an infinite number of musical instruments by an infinite number of musicians. He heard wind, water and fire singing the praises of the Lord.† For him "the music of the spheres is the melody

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\*T.L. Vaswani, In the Sikh Sanctuary, pp-27, 28.

\*\*"Mardania rabab chhed, bani-ai hai"

†Guru Granth Sahib, p. 347.

of the worship of God."\* "On hearing celestial music" says Guru Nanak, "My mind becomes absorbed in God." Guru Nanak lived in celestial music—rather he was himself all music. Puran Singh rightly said, that "He came like a song of Heaven and began singing as he felt the touch of the breeze and saw the blue expanse of sky."\*\*

Under the stars, under trees, on the road side, in forest, and on the eternal sources of the highest mountains in Central Asia, the Guru sang his hymns. In his discussions with the countless varieties of Indian and Eastern mystics and *faqirs*, the Hindu and the Muslim, the *yogi* and the ascetic, the royal and the poor, in a thousand different studies of man and nature, in a deep association of silence with life and labour and love with death, the Guru sang his soul out as the rebeck of Mardana played trembling beyond itself.

"Guru Nanak made very successful use of music in the propagation of his Mission. Bhai Mardana, the Muslim musician who accompanied him on his journeys, played on his rebeck while the Guru used to sing the Divine Song. On blunt and hardened souls this song had a miraculous effect.†" Puran Singh said :

"The dead rose out of their graves,  
As they heard the song of Guru Nanak.  
He healed us all by showering on us the sparks of  
Divine Fire !  
The veils were lifted up, and the disciples went freely  
in and out of the door of death, in concourse of  
song with the Immortals!"  
And again ;  
"His song of Name is our life for ages".‡

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\*Ibid, P. 663

\*\*Puran Singh, The Book of the Ten Masters, p.1.

†Harbans Singh, The Heritage of the Sikhs p. 21.

‡Puran Singh, The Book of the Ten Masters, pp-28, 29.



## **GURU NANAK AND THE DISCIPLINE OF SERVICE**

“Earning one's bread by honest labour; sharing one's earnings with the needy ; and meditating on the holy name of the Lord Divine”\* is a convenient summing up of the fundamental teachings of Guru Nanak.

It is a divine law that man must labour to earn bread—for to live man must work. “Work is worship.”

“He alone treadeth the path of righteousness, sayeth Nanak,

Who earneth his bread with honest labour and shareth it with others.”\*\*

But earnings are to be shared with others willingly and with pleasure. “It is only what you willingly give away in charity to those who deserve it here, out of your lawful earnings, which will benefit your souls hereafter”† “Practise charity and worship the Lord and deal honestly with your fellow-beings,” said Guru Nanak.

No matter how poor one is, there is always a piece of bread that can be shared and when so given makes one feel nobler. The desire to give and receive is part of the human

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\*ਕਿਰਤ ਕਰਨਾ, ਵੰਡ ਛਕਣਾ ਤੇ ਨਾਮ ਜਪਣਾ ।

\*\*Var Sarang Mahla 1.

†Var Asa Mahla I.

nature which makes for graciousness in life. However instinctive may be the desire to give, it needs to be pruned, so as not to be merely an emotional outpouring. Otherwise charity would lose its effectiveness.

‘Sharing one’s earnings with others’ is a gesture of service, which is a practical expression of love. ‘There can be no worship of God without active service’ and those whom one is to serve must be loved. They who love the Lord love everybody—and hence serve everybody. Evils, such as caste and untouchability, that make distinction between man and man, have no place in a ‘religion of service.’

“Religion does not consist in mere words :

He alone is religious who looks on all men as equal.”\*

When you give a morsel of food to the hungry or a piece of cloth to the needy, you worship God through them. We have to serve one and all. When we face the whole humanity we have to stand in reverence—that is in a proper attitude of service. God is best worshipped through selfless service of humanity wherein everyone participates to get His blessings.

“Rid thyself of ego and perform service.

Then alone shalt thou attain honour.”\*\*

Guru Nanak wished his disciples to be servants of God and His people. Having created the human body God has installed His very-self therein. And, ‘this world is the chamber of God wherein resideth the True One Himself.’† Therefore, ‘service rendered here shall win thee a place of honour hereafter.’‡

This was a great lesson taught by the great teacher. Such lessons, in positive virtue, which Guru Nanak gave,

\*Suhi, Mahla.

\*\*Var Asa Slok Mahla 2.

†Var Asa. Mahla 1

‡Siri Rag Mahla 1



were a great improvement upon the traditional ethics. There are always two kinds of duties : what we ought to do and what we ought not to do. The world had very early recognised the latter and many very beautiful sets of commandments, like the Jewish decalogue, have come down to us. But by concentrating all their attention on one side of the matter, the people forgot that any other side existed at all. 'Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal, thou shalt not lie'—thou shalt not do this or that—this was all that was understood by *Dharma* or Duty. This emphasis on the negative side of virtue led to the adoption in the East of asceticism or renunciation as the highest ideal of life, which ultimately meant the negation of all human duty. Guru Nanak preached positive truth. He substituted Love in place of all intricate doctrines of faith. And the practical expression of this Love was Service.

His followers amply profited by this teaching. One can see no higher record of service in the annals of mankind than that of the Sikhs, who were taught to annihilate the thought of self and to utilize all their energies in the service of God and mankind.

Discipline of service has played a prominent role in the evolution of Sikh religion. 'Service' in one form or another is an integral part of a Sikh's duty. According to Sikhism, service should not be confined to fixed forms of sectarian charity, but shall be freely varied according to the needs of those to whom it is rendered.

The Sikh Gurus make something of the man here in this world instead of merely promising high destinies in the world to come. For this purpose the Sikh institutions were so designed as to abolish invidious distinctions between man and man and to retain all who came into their orbit in the arts of peace and service

The Sikh temples (*gurdwaras*) are not only places of worship but also the training centres for service. Such services as sweeping the precincts, serving drinking water to the thirsty, fanning the congregation in hot weather, and serving food to the hungry have always formed an integral part of the functions of a Sikh shrine.

Of these, *langar* (Sanskrit *analgraha* meaning free kitchen\*) is perhaps the most important. A Sikh temple without a free kitchen is inconceivable.

In its very inception, a protest against the inequities of the caste system, the Sikh *langar* is a 'common refectory'† attached to every *gurdwara*. Guru Nanak had started a crusade against the tyrannies of the high-born over the people of humble origin ; and the Guru's *langar* was an institution which was promulgated in this holy campaign. A practical step to root out the evil which was eating into the very vitals of the Indian people, the free kitchen became the foundation of equality and fraternity, among the followers of the Guru. If one studied aright the ideals of Sikhism, one would be simply impressed by a really unique feature ; the secularization of service. And this ideal is most vividly practised in the Guru's free kitchen, which is open to all. Those who profess other faiths are as freely allowed to partake of and help in the running of the kitchen as the followers of the Sikh faith themselves. No distinction is made between man and man, between the Sikhs and the non-Sikhs, between the high caste and the low caste, in seating or serving food in the Guru's kitchen. 'Men of God, wherever they are, of whatever race or

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\*Kapur Singh, *Parasharprasna*, (The Baisakhi of Guru Gobind Singh) p. 339.

†Refectory is the place where refectations or meals are taken. This word is common with the convents. The dining hall in a convent or a monastery is called a refectory. Dr. C.H. Lochlin has used this word for the *langar* (free kitchen) in his book 'The Sikhs and their Scriptures'



creed, belong to one community, the community of man, free from the chains of birth, creed and race.'

Guru Nanak exhorted his followers to regard every one as their own brother. We are brothers born of the same father. 'Our Father is one and we are all his children.' We are members of one family. The Guru showed in actual life how this precept of the 'Brotherhood of Man' was to be lived out; and free kitchen is perhaps the best demonstration of the same. Love and active sympathy for the down-trodden, to lift and hug the fallen, and to share our earnings with the needy and the poor are some of the factors of a true religion. A Sikh temple is a central place of worship and *langar* is a place for serving each other. In *langar* a mingling of all classes is provided and in dining together realisation of the truth 'all food is gift of God and that prejudices about it are entirely invalid.'

A Sikh repeats these words every day in his prayer :—

*Utter Wahiguru and*

*Meditate on the deeds of those who recite the Name..*

*And share their earnings with others.\**

'Bread and water belong to the Lord—and the desire to serve, the pleasure of Sikhs'\*\*—is the common utterance of the Guru's disciples when serving in the free kitchen.

*Langar*, in short, helps in teaching service, spreading equality, removing untouchability and such other evils and prejudices as spring from social and racial distinctions.

The institution of *langar* is as old as Sikhism. It was started by Guru Nanak and carried on by his successors. Guru Nanak declared that every Sikh house should be *Sach Dharam sal*—(ਸਚ ਧਰਮਸਾਲ)—'a place of open-hearted charity, truth and devotion.' In the words of Bhai Gurdas, 'Who ever the

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\**Ardas* (The Sikh Prayer)

\*\**An pani Guru ka, tehl bhavana Sikhan ki.*

ਅਨ ਪਾਣੀ ਗੁਰੂ ਕਾ, ਟਹਿਲ ਭਾਵਨਾ ਸਿੱਖਾਂ ਕੀ,

holy feet of Guru Nanak touched, *dharamsals* were erected', which were at once the houses of charity as well as devotion.

In a way the kitchen in every Sikh's house is a *Guru-ka-langar*, as he is enjoined to share his food with others. Puran Singh rightly observes : 'To-day no Sikh with a grain of that faith in him, can possibly think that he owns the Bread.'\*\*

*Langar* in a Sikh temple is the community kitchen. Every Sikh is expected to take part in the running of the kitchen. He may pay for the expenses, bring provisions or personally contribute 'labour of love' by cleaning utensils, fetching water or fuel, or taking a hand in cooking and distributing food.

Puran Singh calls the *Guru's langar* 'Temple of Bread' and says : "What is a home, but a hospitable feasting of children with bread and love and faith ? What is spiritual life in the temple of flesh, without a full meal first ? The very first temple made by Guru Nanak, therefore, was the Temple of Bread, or *Guru's Langar*. In one common Temple of Bread, the bread of God was made free to the children of man. Let none be hungry where the spirit of God prevails. The Guru's people and the Guru were one home and one family ; but it was no utopian idea, as of the modern socialism or the democracy of labour ; it was the democracy of soul, so gloriously invoked in the temple of the human heart by the genius of the Guru".†

#### GURU NANAK : SANGAT AND PANGAT

Guru Nanak felt that the real cause of the misery of the people was their disunity born of diversity of belief. He, therefore, refused to recognise any distinction between man and man and tried to bring his followers together both in thought and deed. He inculcated a common mode of worship and a common social institute by laying the foundation

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\*Bhai Gurdas, Var I, Pauri 27.

\*\*Puran Singh, The Book of the Ten Masters, p. 141.

†Puran Singh, The Book of the Ten Masters p. 142.



of *sangat* and *pangat*. *Sangat* means "association". It is getting together of noble and good people. *Pangat* literally means a row. It stands for people sitting and eating together in the same row in *Guru-ka-Langar*. From the time of Guru Nanak, *sangat* and *pangat* have gone together, for the Sikhs, both in precept as well as in practice. Wherever there was a *sangat* there also was a *Langar*, as these *Sangats* were 'not merely places of worship but also wayside refectories which gave food and shelter to indigent wayfarers.'\*

Bhai Gurdas recapitulates the every-day duties of a Sikh thus:

*A Sikh is to rise from his bed in the last watch of the night and take his bath. He should then repeat the Name in silence and absolute concentration as instructed by the Guru. His next duty is to go to the Sangat and there, steeped in true reverence, recite and listen to the holy hymns. And before partaking of his food, he should distribute a part of it to others. At dusk he is enjoined to recite the Sodar and before retiring the Sohala.\*\**

A Sikh has thus been given a simple holy routine for daily practice. He has been asked to cultivate a certain discipline. A true Sikh has to be unceasing in his devotion and service to the *sangat*.

The Sikh concept of charity or philanthropy is a widely social concept. Charity or *dan* in the Sikh religion is not merely "giving alms." It rather stands for service. The exhortation of *dan* was meant to create an economic agency, which through offerings made to the Gurus served to keep the Sikh *Langars* alive.

Later on, it crystallized into the institution of *daswandh*.

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\*Glossary of Punjab Tribes and Castes Vol. I, p. 687.

\*\*Bhai Gurdas Vars VI 3 ; XI 4 ; XI 11 ; XII 2.

(tithe) and the Gurus established *masands*\* for its collection.

Teja Singh says, 'It is the glory of the Sikh history that the Guru had in mind the duties of a nation, as much as the duties of an individual'. The Sikhs were given the realization that their concern was not merely their personal salvation, but being members of a community they also had a larger set of duties and responsibilities. The ideal of service in this larger context became intimately bound up with the concept of the 'Sikh Brotherhood' or the 'Sikh *Sangat*.' So the ideal of service for a Sikh ceases to be merely individualistic and involves a sense of corporate responsibility. A corporate sense could only arise if certain obligations were made definite and universal, so that the character of a corporate liability is evolved. "It is important to grasp this," says I. B. Bannerji, "because it explains the speciality that arose in Sikhism. It shows why, in spite of the fact that the ideal of service and the inculcation of a spirit of brotherhood were equally significant features of almost all the schools of religious revival in contemporary India, it was in Sikhism alone that a sense of corporate unity gradually evolved."† And from its earliest days, in Sikhism, one manifestation of this corporate obligation was the maintenance of the *langar*.

As the faith gradually grew and gained popularity a situation arose when it became necessary to organise the *sangats* and provide the Sikhs with convenient local centres. It was to meet this necessity that the *manji*-system was reorganised during the days of Guru Amar Das. He divided the 'Sikh spiritual empire' into 22 'bishopries' or *manjis*. *Manjis*

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\*In the time of the Afghan kings, nobles were styled *Masnad-i-All*. Hence the word *masnad* was employed as an ordinary appellation of courtiers. From its frequent use it was changed on the tongues of the Sikhs into '*masands*.' The Guru was called *Sacha Padshah* or the true king, so his agents were styled *Masands*. —*Dabstan-i-Mazahib*).

†Indu Bhushan Bannerji, *Evolution of the Khalsa*, Vol. I, p. 254.



literally means "Couches," on which the Gurus sat and issued instructions to their audiences. These *manjis* organised the Sikh *Sangats*; and as the *sangats* multiplied steadily so grew the *Guru-ka-langar*, a free community kitchen, which is an essential part of every Sikh *gurdwara* or the Sikh temple.

The *masands*, together with the *sangats* formed the pivot of the organisation during the time of Guru Arjan and for several decades had creditably served the cause of Sikhism. The well-knit organisation of the *sangats* and the *masands* not only kept the Sikhs together and in touch with the Guru, but also provided them with funds necessary for the various kitchens at different places and for other common purposes.

Under Guru Hargobind and his successors the system of *sangats* and *masands* was supplemented by several *dhuans* (hearths) and *bakhshishs* (bounties)\*.

But the *masand*-system could not continue long in proper order. The misappropriation of offerings became a habit with almost all the *masands*. So Guru Govind Singh, convinced of the perversity of the *masands*, abolished this system.

Because of liberal traditions, Sikhs are bound by no strict dogmas or rituals, observe no rigid do's and don'ts in the matter of food, and recognise no difference between man and man in *sangat* and *pangat*. These are the inviolable principles of the Sikh tradition as laid down by Guru Nanak and carried on by the other Gurus, and are being followed by faithful Sikhs till now.

A true Sikh spirit shines through the congregational prayers and chanting of hymns in the Sikh *sangats*, and serving of food in the *langars* to all who sit in the *pangats*, which are very essential religio-social services in the Sikh

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\*Teja Singh, *Sikhism Its Ideals and Institutions*, pp. 72, 73.

*gurdwaras*. These institutions have played a great role in building the liberal and tolerant character of the Sikhs.

In fact, *sangat* and *pangat* had a potent influence in the emancipation of the down-trodden in India in general and the Punjab in particular. These institutions gradually brought before the people the vision of a classless democratic society, where all could claim equal status in faith and in practice. These allied and integrated institutions bestow upon the Sikhs a distinct individuality, dignity and unity. They give them the discipline of service and a spirit of co-operation, teach them philanthropy, equality and brotherhood.

### GURU NANAK'S CHARITY

Even when Guru Nanak was yet a child his compassionate heart would melt in deep sympathy for the poor and the needy. He often offered them food and clothing. Child Nanak took great pleasure in visiting and serving bands of Hindu *sadhus* and Muslim *faqirs*, who lived in the woods in the neighbourhood of Talwandi and would come to the town off and on. Some times he would himself go to the jungle and meet them there, and distribute among them articles of food.

His father, Mehta Kalu, wanted to check what he thought the wasteful conduct of his son. But how could Nanak be stopped? Charity, openhanded charity, was in his grain. He had come to tend and feed with the bread of God the souls and bodies of the needy.

Once, the Guru's father, Mehta Kalu, complained to Rai Bular, the local *diwan* of Talwandi, that his son gave away his earnings to the poor. Rai Bular, in reply, warned Mehta Kalu saying: 'Your son is not an ordinary man. You can have from me double the amount he has spent on the needy, but do not stop him doing so.'



There are many interesting stories from the early life of the Divine Master, while at Talwandi that he felt pleasure in distributing articles of daily requirement to the needy and feeding the hungry at all times. Charity moved with Nanak, wherever he went. And he always felt pleasure in satisfying the needs of others, thinking that he was performing the duty of man and God. No one went back disappointed at his door.

He left his birth-place, Talwandi, for the first time when his father gave him some money to set him up in trade. His father instructed him to enter into a '*khara sauda*' or good bargain. He left home and came across some ascetics—the saints of God—near Chuharkana. The saints had not taken food for several days. He feasted them. That was perhaps the first *pangat* which was fed by Guru Nanak himself. He thought that there was no bargain better than to give in the name of God. Making thus the best bargain he returned empty handed.

This was a glimpse of the *langar* which he established later as a regular institution.

The world was suffering from spiritual starvation and Guru Nanak had come to feed all. Bread served to the hungry *sadhus* was but symbolic. 'The people are more than myself,' said the Guru. 'Religion is inspiration of love. The beloved is in His people, and the service of the people is the service of God. And it is through service that love is realized.'\*

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It is recorded in all chronicles that at Sultanpur Guru Nanak used to address regular *sangats* every evening. Many would come to join the holy service, who were also fed by the Guru, out of the rations that were permitted to him with his

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\*Puran Singh, The Book of Ten Masters, pp. 142, 143.

salary. He distributed all he got, for he had no liking for hoarding.

At Sultanpur, Guru Nanak had ample opportunities of satisfying his master passion of openhanded charity. At the *modikhana* (the store house), where he served as a *modi* (store-keeper), he used to extend his helping hand to the poor. After supplying the needs and expenses of his own family, out of his allowances and profits, he used to give away a large part of his earnings in charity. He bestowed on others love along with charity. It was here that he began distributing himself with the free distribution of the provisions to the needy. None begged at Nanak's store-house in vain. He thus won the affection of the poor and the needy and the admiration of the people.

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One day, the Master weighing out wheat flour, counted the weighings—'One, two, three,.....' till he reached the number thirteen. But at this he forgot all his counting and went on weighing and singing his famous 'one-word song'—'*Tera, Tera, Tera,.....*'—'*Thine, Thine, Thine,.....*'

In Punjabi language the word *Tera* means both the arithmetical figure 13 and the phrase 'I am thine'. His mind, transfixed on the Divine, would not stoop to earthly things, and for all subsequent weighings he quoted only thirteen. Blessed indeed were those on whom was thus bestowed unasked divine food for the soul, as they came only to get food for the body.

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And when the call had come and the Guru had set out for the journeys, to preach his ideals, in the distant lands, he first went to the house where he used to lodge his disciples, guests, and friends. He opened wide the doors and invited the poor to take away all that was there ; and to those who hesitated he himself handed over his articles.



The Guru was ready to leave Sultanpur for good. The Nawab of that place made an attempt to dissuade the Guru from taking the course of renunciation, but when the Guru told the Nawab about his mission the latter bent his head in reverence and said : ‘.....but do kindly accept for the use of your family the sum that has been found due to you from the *modikhana*.’ The Guru desired him to distribute the amount among the poor saying : ‘As for my family and myself the Sustainer of All will provide us.’

Having given away all his material wealth, he was now ready to distribute, with an equally liberal and generous heart, the spiritual riches that he had received from the Lord.

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Guru Nanak went to Eminabad. There lived a carpenter—Lalo—, who used to make wooden implements. A devout and a true disciple of his Master, he lived a life of honest poverty and natural simplicity, because his needs were few, and he was contented and happy. Guru Nanak went to his house and lived with him for several days. Not caring for the comforts and dainties of the rich, the Guru preferred the coarse bread and plain water of Lalo, who was God-loving and God-fearing. Lalo, the man of God earned his bread by the sweat of his brow, so he was dear to the Guru.

It happened that Malik Bhago, the local *diwan* of the Pathan governor had arranged a sacrificial feast and expected holy men of all religions in the town to join and partake of his repast, so that he could acquire merit.

The news that a saint was staying at the house of Lalo reached Malik Bhago. He immediately sent a servant to fetch him for the feast. The Guru, however, declined to accept the invitation. Malik believed that his ‘*yajna*’ would be incomplete unless all the holy men graced the occasion.

Bhago met the Guru himself and asked, “Why do you

refuse my feast and eat the food cooked by a low caste, though they say you are a saint ?”

“I have no caste,” was the Guru’s reply, “nor do I sit in a *chauka*\*. To me the whole earth is pure and holy.”

“But why did you refuse to join my feast ?” asked Bhago.

“Your bread is blood and Lalo’s bread is milk.” was the reply with a smile.

The Guru continued : “I have no taste for the sumptuous but blood-tainted dishes. Dainties and comforts which are had by cruelties over the labouring poor are verily interfused with blood of the unfortunate victims ; whereas Lalo earns his food by sheer honest labour and shares his earning with others and hence his food is interfused with milk and sweetness.”

Surely, a noble and honest man of humble birth is far more dear to God and the Guru than a high-born evil tyrant. Guru Nanak said :

“People who are lowliest among the lowly,  
of a caste that is deemed the lowest of  
all low castes,

Sayeth Nanak, I am with them a friend and  
a companion ;

What have I to do with the high and the great ?

Where the lowly are treated with a loving care,

There do Thy Mercy and Thy Grace descend.”\*\*

Malik Bhago fell at the feet of the Guru and prayed for mercy. The Guru bade him rise and sin no more.

“Listen” said the Guru :

\*Literally meaning a square. A dining place usually in a square form, which is marked sacred by the high caste Hindus, is called *chauka* (ਚੌਕਾ):

\*\*Sri Rag, Mahla 1



“That which belongs to another  
Is unlawful like the flesh of pig to one,\*  
And cow's flesh to another.\*\*

The *Guru* and *Peer* will extend their grace,  
If thou refrainest from eating carrion.”†

Bhago went home, light in body and heart. He distributed all his wealth among the poor and henceforth vowed to live a life of love, devotion and service. Lalo, whom he considered a low-caste, he began to deem his elder brother and dearest friend.

Thus did the Guru lift the lowly unto eminence. Thus did he destroy the pride of caste which was degrading and demoralizing the people. Thus did he lay the foundation of Holy Brotherhood,—‘where the lowest is equal with the highest in race as in creed, in political rights as in religious hopes’—a thought which is practiced and manifested in the *Guru's langar*.

Malik Bhago thenceforth made it a principle of his life to earn his livelihood by honest means. He turned his house into a *sach dharamsal*, where not just the holy people were fed only on certain special occasions, but rich and poor, high and low were all welcome at every time.

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Guru Nanak turned many houses into *sach dharamsals* where the needy were not only fed but also given shelter if they required.

When Sajjan *Thug* was reclaimed by the Guru and appointed a missionary, he too like Malik Bhago distributed everything that he had hoarded. The big mansion, where thousands of murders of the innocent travellers had been

\*That is to a Mussalman.

\*\*That is to a Hindu.

†Var Majh Ki, Slok Mahla 1

committed, was razed to the ground. Sajjan built a simple and small hut for himself which he considered a *dharamsal* for others, a place of all-embracing love and service. The Guru had instructed him in the fundamentals of his faith and charged him with the duty of reclaiming others.

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There lived at Dacca a land-lord named Bhoomia. He was a dacoit, but with all his wrong doings, kept running a free kitchen, where all the saints and *faqirs*, travellers and wayfarers were fed. The people were afraid of him and none had the courage to speak a word against him.

When Guru Nanak went to Dacca, people sent him to Bhoomia's kitchen, saying that all the holy men and the strangers took meals there. The Guru went there. The divine light and radiant joy of the Guru's face singled him out. Bhoomia came running to him and requested, "Please come to my kitchen and partake of the food ready therein." "No," said Nanak, "your food is saturated with the blood of the poor."

These words entered Bhoomia's very soul. With folded hands he again said, "Pray do grace my kitchen and taste a bit of the food and I will do what you instruct."

"Give up the profession of a dacoit then," said the Guru.

Bhoomia bowed at the Guru's feet and the latter instructed him thus :

"1. Do not rob the poor. 2. Always speak the truth. 3. Do no harm to anyone whose salt you have tasted. 4. Do not allow the innocent to suffer for your sake."

"These shall I obey with all my heart and soul ; but, pray, do grace my kitchen."



Guru Nanak with other saints and travellers partook of Bhoomia's food and departed after a short stay.

Bhoomia still had a kitchen but not in his own name any more. He served food to all in God's name. Bhoomia's kitchen had become the Guru's *langar*.

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One Bhai Mansukh, an enterprising merchant, was among the first devoted disciples of Guru Nanak. In one of his trade trips he went to Ceylon. After his prayers and meditations every morning he used to distribute *karah prashad* among his neighbours.

The king of Ceylon, Shivnabh, was a Vaishnava, and had ordered the day of *Ekadashi Brat* (fast) to be strictly observed throughout his kingdom. Everyone had to keep the fast for the whole day and break that with fruits and uncooked eatables.

An *Ekadashi* day fell during Mansukh's stay in Ceylon. Firm in his faith, devotion and daily routine, he prepared *karah prashad* even on *Ekadashi* day. When he wanted that to be distributed amongst his neighbours a complaint was lodged with the king that a foreign trader had not observed the fast and had cooked *karah prashad*.

Immediately Mansukh was taken to the king's presence, who inquired, "How dare you break the law of the land and cook on the *Ekadashi* day?"

In a very sweet and humble tone Mansukh explained to the king how he had met Guru Nanak and that the Guru's teachings had raised him above all doubts and fears. He observed no fast and had found the right path which showed one-in-all and all-in-one.

The talk of Mansukh impressed Shivnabh so deeply that he requested him to arrange a meeting with Guru Nanak.

“Remember him day and night in true love and devotion and he shall come to you.”

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Attracted by the long vigil and prayers of the king Guru Nanak was drawn to Ceylon. Shivnabh went barefooted to the Guru, who was then resting in a garden, and prostrated himself at his holy feet, saying, “Blessed am I that you have graced this land. Pray do set your holy feet in my palace and purify it.” Guru Nanak replied, “Start a *langar* and build a *dharamsal* for the poor and the needy then shall I come to thee.”

Immediately the *langar* was started and the building of *dharamsal* began. As soon as it was ready, Guru Nanak went to the *dharamsal*. For several months the Guru stayed there, addressed the congregations and taught the people how to meditate on the Divine Name.

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Guru Nanak, during the later part of his life, settled down at Kartarpur, as a farmer, with his family. There too he built a *dharamsal*. He also had a *langar* attached to the *dharamsal*. The Guru's free kitchen became a distinctive feature of the holy colony of Kartarpur. The corn that the Guru raised with the sweat of his own brow was used for feeding the devotees who came to meet him or the needy who came at his door. Whether at Kartarpur or away in their respective villages the people worked for the ‘common weal of the community’. Many brought their earnings into the common kitchen, when they came to meet the Guru.

Puran Singh says, “The sacrifice of selfishness was made for the gladness of the soul that the act gave to the people who came round Guru Nanak. The souls of the people were so fully nourished and satisfied that they could not entertain feelings of difference and duality...We are never selfish when



we are in love. The people came and laid their selfishness at his feet and begged a little of it for his service. To serve the devotees was serving the Master. This union was so spiritually co-operative that none knew if his own hands were his or of the Guru...The bodies and hearts and minds were mingling with each other and with those of the Master, by the magic of His presence amongst them. Here was a religion that made love and labour the common property of man.”\*

By settling down at Kartarpur as a farmer and by starting a free kitchen with his *dharamsal*, Guru Nanak set the living example and manifestation of his teaching of ‘earning one’s bread by honest labour and sharing one’s earning with others.’

Neither sun nor rain nor any other calamity of whatever magnitude could stop the serving of the meals in the common kitchen of the Guru.

The fire lit in the ‘Temple of Bread’ by Guru Nanak was kept burning by his successors, the other nine Gurus who walked in his footsteps. And the institution of the *langar* continued to unite the people and warm the hearts of the faithful throughout the years to follow.

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\*Furan Singh, The Book of the Ten Masters, p. 142.

## AN EXPOSITION OF JAPJI SAHIB

Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Scripture, begins with the *Japji*. This long hymn is the epitome of Sikh religious philosophy and the rest of the Holy Book is an exposition of the thought contained in the *Japji*.

It is one of the products of those minds who have tasted God-consciousness and whose words beckon generation after generation of men to prepare themselves for the descent of the Divine into their Lives.

It is Guru Nanak's most remarkable contribution.

'In sacred literature the *Japji* may be aptly compared with the *Gita* and the *New Testament*. Just as the *Gita* contains the kernel of the Hindu religious philosophy and the *New Testament* the fundamental tenets of Christianity, similarly the essence of the Sikh religious philosophy is enshrined in the *Japji*.\*

This beautiful poem of Guru Nanak is not a hymn to be sung in accompaniment with a musical instrument. He has, therefore, affixed no tune or *raga* to it, as he has done in the case of all other poems of his.\*\*

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\*Gurmukh Nihal Singh in the Foreword to The Psalm of Life by G.S. Bedi, Sikh Publishing House, p. vi.

\*\*All the hymns incorporated in *Guru Granth Sahib* are classified into different *ragas* and tunes except the *Japji* in the beginning and the *swayyas* and the *shalokas* at the end of the Holy Volume.



## MOST IMPORTANT BANI FOR THE SIKHS

The *Japji* is the most important of the five *banis* which the Sikhs are enjoined to recite daily. There are a large number of Sikhs, men and women as also a number of Sindhi and Punjabi *Sehajdharis* and Hindus who begin their daily routine with the recitation of the *Japji*. Most of them remember it by heart and derive a great inspiration and solace from it.

When *Amrit* or Sikh baptism ceremony is performed five compositions of *Gurbani* are recited (as did Guru Gobind Singh himself, when he baptised the Khalsa in 1699 at Keshgarh in Anandpur) and *Japji* is the first hymn out of the five.

A good Sikh rises very early in the morning and in those early and ambrosial hours of the morning quietly recites the *Japji*. Guru Nanak himself says in the *Japji*, "In the ambrosial hours of the morn meditate on the grace of the True-Name." In fact in the early hours of the morning, the mind is fresh when it is tranquilized by calm sleep at night and is nearer heaven. As such it can dwell on the difficult problems of human life discussed in the *Japji*.

Some of the devout Sikhs, who act upon the hopeful message : 'Thou shalt not live by bread alone ; live more by *Japji* than by bread, Puran Singh writes, ".....when I reflect that the Sikhs of the olden time, the disciples of the Guru, lived on the hymn of *Japji*, I am filled with joy and thankfulness. So profound has been the influence of the constant repetition of the divine lyric by my Sikh ancestors,.....that when I dip myself in cold water, involuntarily escapes the song out of me as the birds cry out at the break of dawn."\* While making a personal confession Puran Singh says, "I have been saved from death by the love of the maker of *Japji*. I have doubted frequently with others of the merit of repeat-

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\*Puran Singh, Spirit Born People, p. 109

ing the Psalms of the Guru, but actual experiments conducted by myself on myself, I find that without *Japji* one dies.\* There are many Sikhs like Puran Singh who have such Faith and today if you ask such a Sikh to choose between the *Japji* and the bread ; he or she will answer unhesitatingly '*Japji*'.

### AUTHENTICITY OF THE TEXT.

Guru Nanak took precaution to preserve his own teachings. He made definite arrangements for successors whose primary responsibility was the preservation and spread of his own message. When he designated a succession to himself he handed over his compositions to his successor, Guru Angad.

Although there is no manuscript extant of the *Japji* in Guru Nanak's hand, he may indeed have written one. At least, he probably wrote separate psalms from time to time and bequeathed them to his followers in fragmentary form. But the Guru himself in his later years may have made a collection of those hymns.

Kapur Singh writes, "the real facts are that the second Sikh Guru, Guru Angad (1504-1552), formed the nucleus of the book, now called, *Guru Granth Sahib*, by collecting in one manuscript the revelations of Guru Nanak, which then existed in more than one manuscripts, written by Guru Nanak himself. That these manuscripts were written in what are called, *Gurmukhi* characters, by Guru Nanak himself, is hardly in doubt."\*\*

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Guru Nanak's sacred verses are several, all embodied in the Holy Sikh Scripture, *Guru Granth Sahib*, in which are also placed the hymns composed by some of his successors

\*Ibid p. 116.

\*\*Kapur Singh *Prasharprasna* (Baisakhi of Guru Gobind Singh), p. 233.



and a few celebrated saints of India. About one fifth of the *granthic* hymns are the compositions of Guru Nanak.

At Kartarpur, district Jullundur, Punjab, the original manuscript of *Guru Granth Sahib*, with corrections in the hand of Guru Arjan, the fifth Guru, is preserved.

In regard to the authenticity of the text of the Sikh Scriptures M.A. Macauliffe writes :

“The Sikh Religion differs as regards the authenticity of its dogmas from most other theological systems. Many of the great teachers the world has known have not left a line of their composition and we only know what they taught through tradition or second hand information...But the compositions of the Sikh Gurus are preserved and we know, at first hand what they taught. They employed the vehicle of verse which is generally unalterable by copyists and we even become in time familiar with their different styles...”\*

And the *Japji* in verse, in Guru Nanak's own style, has been preserved in the first manuscript of *Guru Granth Sahib*, since it was compiled and edited by Guru Arjan Dev.

### WHEN WAS THE JAPJI COMPOSED ?

In the *Janam Sakhis* of Guru Nanak it is mentioned that the Guru, while residing at Sultanpur, used to go to the nearby stream called the *Bein*. for his daily bath, When he was about 27 years old, one day, he went to have a dip in the stream. He disappeared for three days, when, in response to a special vision, he entered the final phase of his life, when God offered him the cup of *amrit*, nectar, in token and pledge of divine favour, and in promise of the Guru's ultimate success. God then commissioned him to 'repeat the Name', to inspire his disciples also to repeat it, and to teach all mankind the 'true religion'. It is recorded in the chronicles that the Guru

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\*M.A. Macauliffe, The Sikh Religion, Vol I., Introduction

under the inspiration of this experience uttered the *mul-mantra* or 'basic text' of Sikhism, and the first *shloka* which is in the beginning of the *Japji*.

Even before the *Janam Sakhis* were written Bhai Gurdas (1560-1639) had said in his first *var* that when Guru Nanak settled down at Kartarpur (around 1521 A.D.) after long journeys, the daily routine of the Sikhs was to recite the *Japji* in the morning and sing the *Sodar* and the *Arti* in the evening. Doubtless to say that by the time Guru Nanak came back to live at Kartarpur his Sikhs had started reciting the *Japji*.

When was this hymn of meditation actually composed? No one knows. 'It may have been when the Guru had settled down at Kartarpur after his years of travel. But what does it matter? No one cares to know when the *Gita* was written, for books like these are never dated. They are as timeless as the doctrines they teach.'†

There are different theories about the time when the *Japji* was written. Some believe that Guru Nanak composed this hymn at Sultanpur. While others, like Bhia Mani Singh, are of the opinion that the *Japji* is the product of the discussion or colloquy which the Guru had with *Sidhas* and the *Yogis*. But some chronicles reveal that the *Japji* was composed in pieces at different times by Guru Nanak. For example, when the Guru went to Baghad he gave a sermon to the *Pirs* which forms the 22nd Stanza of the *Japji*, beginning with these words: "There are worlds beyonds worlds below, and innumerable worlds above."

A few interpreters believe that when Guru Nanak narrated to Guru Angad his discussions with the *Sidhas* the latter requested him to compose a hymn of meditation and Guru Nanak uttered the opening *shloka* of the *Japji* i.e.

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†Sohan Singh, *The Seeker's Path*, Introduction, p-xiv-



"God was true in the beginning before all ages began ; He is true even now and shall be for ever more." And Guru Nanak asked Guru Angad, to select and arrange such verses which could be put together under the heading of *Jap* or 'meditations'.\*

Dr. Mohan Singh who has quoted an other old manuscript,\*\* which gives a little different version. Santokh Singh the famous writer of *Gurpartapsurudey* (commonly known as *Suraj Parkash*) also gives a similar version and that is that when Guru Angad asked Guru Nanak to reveal to him the *Mul Mantra* the latter composed the *Mul Mantra* and dictated the text of the *Japji* to Guru Angad.

Some scholars like Sahib Singh † and S.S. Kohli‡ say that the *Japji* is said to have been composed by Guru Nanak in the later years of his life, when he settled down at Kartarpur. He composed this long poem for the recitation, guidance and spiritual advancement of his Sikhs

Taking an account of the references given above we come to the probable conclusion that the *Japji* in its present form was not composed at one time. It was composed by Guru Nanak in bits at different occasions. At what times, in his life, the Guru wrote or uttered the different stanzas of the *Japji* cannot be said with full authority, but the present form of this long hymn was given at Kartarpur.

### MOST DIFFICULT COMPOSITION OF GURU NANAK

The *Japji* is the most difficult composition out of the philosophic and mystic poems uttered by Guru Nanak. This piece of religious literature stands out as also the most

\*Shibhoo Nath, *Japji Satik*, MS 1701 A.D.

\*\*Mohan Singh, *Panjabi Bhakha Vigyan Ate Gurmat Gyan*, p 1

†Sahib Singh, *Japji Satik* (Panjabi) Introduction,

‡Surinder Singh Kohli, *The Spokesman*, weekly, Baisakhi Number, 1968. p 39.

difficult part of the Sikh scripture. The thoughts contained in it are of the nature of meditations. They are deep and compact, and as such quite beyond the ordinary man's comprehension. A man must possess a ready knowledge of so many systems of thought, various orders of religion, before he can grasp the full significance of the reasoning by which Guru Nanak clears up the sophistries and follies of men and arrives at the Real Truth.

Moreover, the style is so compressed that its sense becomes difficult to understand. Besides the 'elliptical style there is another circumstance, which has made it so difficult. Guru Nanak taught the people to have direct communion with God in whatever language they spoke. There was to be no mystery or superstition about the sanctity of any particular language. But the people soon forgot this lesson and reverted to the old belief in the sanctity of mere words. They began to repeat mechanically the text of *Japji* as if it were a charm or *mantra*. So there was a disregard for the meaning and spirit of the text, which became more and more obscure, not because it was originally so, but because it had been neglected so long to be read consciously'.\*

Again the Guru has used technical and allegorical expressions which carry special meaning in mystic literature. For example, he uses words as *kur* (for *batil*, meaning all that is not God) *hukam* (meaning the Will or the Disciplinary Order of God), *rup* (for *hussan*, which means the concentration of perfection in one Nature) etc.

## THE TITLE OF THE HYMN

The title of this beautiful poem, as given in its beginning is *Jap* and not *Jap.i* as it is popularly named now. The word 'Ji' is used after *Jap* as a mark of respect. Almost all annota-

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\*Teja Singh, The Japji, p. 8.



tors have taken *Jap* to mean meditate or repeat, but, if we look through the Holy Volume of *Guru Granth Sahib*, we will find that the word in this form (i.e. JAP, is always used as a noun, and that when it is intended as a verb imperative, it must have a *siari* ( ਿ ) before the *pappa* ( ਪ ) (i.e. ਜਿਪਿ). Besides, it is marked off with two strokes on either side of it, which are full-stops before and after it. Hence the word *Jap* should be translated as meditation, which is the heading of the text.

### THE FORM OF THE JAPJI

The *Japji* in its traditional form has a prelude to its thirty eight principle stanzas (known as *pauris*) and also a postlude, the former professing to set the 'basic theme' (*Mul Mantra*) consisting of about a dozen words and the latter providing six lines of reiteration in conclusion, in Guru Nanak's name.

The Guru has used 4977 letters and exactly the same number of short vowel marks. In each of the stanzas the number of letters is equal to the number of short vowel marks. Same is true for the prelude and postlude. The whole work amounts to three hundred and seventy, five lines.

The 38 principal stanzas of the *Japji* are known as *pauris*. *Pauri* means the rung of the ladder (or the step of the stair-case). As the rungs of the ladder carry the climber, step by step ahead so do the *pauris* of a poem carry its idea further, step by step. The *padas* of long poems or *vars* are usually called *pauris*. The *pauris* in a long poem may or may not have uniformity i.e. they may differ in metre and in the number of verses ; e. g. in the *Japji* 8th to 15th all the eight *pauris* have the same metre and the same number of verses, which is six in each case, while 16th *pauri* contains 24 short verses and 27th *pauri* has 22 long ones, etc.

The prevailing type of versification of the *Japji* is what is known as *doha*, or rhymed 'couplet' each line usually consisting of twelve plus ten *matras*, or syllables. The longer verses are composed mostly of stanzas six lines each or multiples of six although some contain only five or multiples of five each.

In the *Japji* the rhythm is not that of a regular nature. There is a great freedom of movement and a free use of words, with an exhibition of a grammar all their own.

Repetition is frequently indulged in, for some words phrases and sometimes even the couplets are favourites with Guru Nanak. The following couplet, for example, represents a recurring theme of stanzas number 8, 9, 10 and 11 :

O' Nanak, the faithful are ever in eternal-bliss,  
Sorrow and sin are destroyed by their hearkening  
(that is their devotion).

Similarly the last couplet of the each stanza from the 12th to the 15th is the same. Again from the 16th to the 19th stanzas the last two lines have been repeated.

In stanzas 17, 18 and 19 the word *asankh* or 'countless' has been repeated in the beginning of almost all the lines and in stanza number 26 the word *amul* or 'Priceless' has been repeated for more than fifteen times. Some more examples of repetition of lines and words can easily be given from the *Japji*.

But this frequent and sometimes even continuous repetition does not create any monotony for the mind of the reader, but rather adds to the flow, rhythm and music of this poem and helps one to a great extent, to commit to memory this long and difficult hymn.



## THE PROCESS

The whole of the *Japji* is roughly divisible into four parts. They consist of (i) first seven stanzas (ii) the next twenty stanzas (iii) the next four stanzas and (iv) the remaining seven stanzas. The first seven stanzas of these define and bring into relief the problem of the seeker of the Divine. The next part takes the reader step by step on the way, till he or she arrives at vision of the Great Reality. The third part describes the attitude and outlook of the person who has tasted of the Divine. The last part summarises the whole process and is very valuable in itself as it vividly describes the stages of the spiritual development of the meditator's soul who is a seeker of the Way of Truth and Eternal Bliss.

But with a little careful study of the *Japji* it is easily possible to see that a further division of these *pauris* can be made. The 38 *pauris* plus two *shlokas* i. e. 40 stanzas can be divided into ten parts with a group of four each.\*

The purpose of the *Japji* is to seek and arrive at the vision of Reality ; and the process adopted to achieve this end has a strange resemblance to what we call the 'scientific method of thought'. In the *Japji* first the problem—"How shall then the Truth be attained and the partition (or veil) of false hood be demolished " has been defined and then the Guru has put forth his approach. "He exposes the futility of the mechanical forms of thought or worship, and sets us thinking for ourselves. He takes up one by one the most important questions of the religious life.\*\* Like a true teacher, he first gives his own impressions as starting points and then he set us thinking originally (cf. i-vii). Further he gives all the possible data available on the problem and then there is the inter-relationship of the phenomena (cf. viii-xix)

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\*For detail see the author's *Jap Veechar*, S. G. P. C., pp 13,14.

\*\*Teja Singh. The *Japji*, p 6.

In the next four stanzas (xx-xxiii) some sort of structure is formed for the solution of the problem and suddenly the solution is given (c.f. xxiv). After that the Guru gradually makes us realise the expanding significance and application of the new insight which He bestows upon us, (cf. xxv-xxvii) and thus a drastic change in our mode of thinking is made (cf. xxviii-xxxi), so much so that the ultimate secret which transmutes the baser metal of humanity into the pure gold of a divinely inspired life is known.

### THE THEME OF THE JAPJI

The *Japji* emphasises the oneness of God and the cult of the Name or *Bhakti*, the love for the supreme Lord for which a complete surrender of one's thought, word and deed to His Will is deemed essential.

The great theme of the *Japji* is the eternal problem of human deliverance. It imparts the knowledge of the Creator and shows a practical path of self-realisation. Guru Nanak gives the vision of the Divine Being, the Creator and points out the way to become intune with the Infinite.

In the words of Gurmukh Nihal Singh the *Japji* 'raises fundamental issues, it discusses the problem of human existence and that of meeting the Creator. It describes very briefly many of the religious practices prevalent in India during the past ages and it discusses the philosophic issues involved in the religious problems. It offers a solution and describes the Sikh way of reaching God. The *Japji* focusses the attention of the readers upon the Divine Personality, the one Supreme Spirit, the one Source of Life and Light, the one Permanent Being, the Creator.'\*

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\*Gurmukh Nihal Singh, foreword to *Japji Sahib* translated by Puran Singh, 3rd edition p 5.



The *Japji* expounds a 'socially and spiritually extensive and inclusive religion in the name of Him' who is introduced in the prelude, the *mul mantra*, who is the One, Universal, loving God, who makes no unfavourable distinctions among men, even though they themselves are born 'high and low by His Will' (cf. ii). The Almighty Lord as described in the *Japji* looks upon men's hearts more than upon their deeds, and takes account of the potential goodness in all mankind. This, according to J. Archer 'is an optimistic note unusual in Hindu India.'\* Guru Nanak presents the view that God may be called by any name, "He cannot be described in the word of man...but there is but one Benefactor of all creatures; may I never forget Him" (cf. v). "The Guru repudiates at least, most of the popular ideas and practices of loose, contemporary Hinduism (cf. i, v), and softens the rigours of Islamic deism (cf. xxii, xxv). He does not treat the gods as a fiction worthy only of men's imperfect minds, nor the world as the sphere of *maya* or illusion ; nevertheless, he is not altogether free of evidences of traditional and environmental influence."\*\*

The type of world-renunciation which Guru Nanak recommends in the *Japji* is not to be professed or realised by rituals, pilgrimages or by ascetic solitude. Rather, 'the profession and the comprehension of the Name is itself all-rewarding' (cf. xxi). If the devotee will but attend upon the Name he will come to know all worlds, all spheres, and every thing. If he repeats the Name and comprehends its love he destroys all sin and sorrow. There is sure salvation through the Name.

In the *Japji* there are 'traces of the prevalent, traditional, indigenous theories of *Karma* and transmigration, two

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\*Archer, The Sikhs, p 116.

\*\*Ibid, p 110.

aspects of one theory, in fact. No strictly Indian thinker or reformer during the last two thousand years has been able to ignore them, or has ignored them, and (Guru) Nanak was to that extent an Indian.\* And it is the Name that frees the devotee from the bondage of *Karma* and from the round of transmigration has been expressed in the *Japji*.

But there is a touch of His Will or Order every now and then in this gospel of Guru Nanak. For example: "Whatever He Wills comes to pass" (cf. xxi) and "whatsoever pleases Him, that will He do subject to no command at all." (cf. xxvii). Guru Nanak preached a gospel of devotion (*bhakti*) and not one of karmik determination. He in his *Japji* teaches loving-kindness of the Infinite (cf. iv), giving a lesson that 'men have the liberty not only to sow but also to reap' (cf. xx). He also says that 'God gives liberally to those who crave and ask him' (cf. iv).

## LITERARY WORKMANSHIP

Guru Nanak expressed himself in verse which was in accordance with the prevailing literary fashion, but 'he never allowed the exigencies of versification to get the better of his thought.'\*\* The reader gets no experience of the monotony of a single verse pattern in the *Japji*. The Guru has arranged these stanzas such that he changes frequently from longer to shorter and back to longer lines. Sometimes in the midst of longer lines he punctuates shorter ones which serve to emphasise the thoughts (cf. v, xviii). The number of lines in the stanzas also varies, depending solely on what and how much the Guru has to say. He did not care even sacrificing the rhyming in some stanzas. But it is one of the qualities of his literary workmanship that in all the variat-

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\*Ibid., p 119

\*\*Sohan Singh, *The Seeker's Path* p. xxii.



ion of length and rhyme, the flow of language never loses its rhythm and grace.

Even in the sternly philosophical *Japji*, we come across moments where the dramatic element has saved the argument from becoming an inspired version of itself. The stanza xxviii marks a poetic close to the argument of the Treatise. In the last two lines in each stanza from xxviii to xxxi there is dramatic expression——“hail.....the indebtedness of wise men for their wisdom to the supreme source of all wisdom.” The supreme source is the Primal Being who through all ages remains the same.

In the *Japji*, the important philosophical truths have been stated in a beautiful, meaningful and terse language and in a succinct poetical form. It is, therefore, not easy to understand, much less to explain, this masterpiece of the Great Master, but to those who know the language, in which it is written its recitation is ennobling and uplifting. It is the first religious or mystic composition in the Punjabi language and its values as literature is also very great. But of course, the *Japji* is not the composition to indicate the great Guru's literary craftsmanship. For that the inquisitive reader will have to go to other writings of the Guru, besides the *Japji*.

## LANGUAGE OF THE JAPJI.

The basic language of the *Japji* is Punjabi of the time of Guru Nanak. As far as possible the words used are simple, but still the piece stands out, as the most difficult part of the Sikh Scripture. The Guru has tried to express his ideas in the shortest compass possible. He has been so sparing of words that, like the old authors of Sanskrit *sutras* he never gives a syllable more than is absolutely necessary.

“The Punjabi language had never before (or since) been

put to such a tremendous task. Its vocabulary was very scanty, and that too had never been employed for religious or philosophical purposes. The strain was too heavy for it and it is really a wonder how Guru Nanak was ever able to execute the work with such a fine success. Even now, with all the increased, resources and facilities of expression, we dare not use vernacular to express our thought half so concisely as Guru Nanak has done in his *Jap.*’\*

The *Japji* and the later, more inclusive, *Guru Granth Sahib*, have their own distinct language, not only in alphabet but also in grammar. The alphabet is *Gurmukhi*, *Gurumukhi*, or the language uttered from the Guru’s mouth. The *Japji* is in the ‘Guru’s tongue’ which Guru Nanak spoke, although he did not invent its alphabet. With his distinct language and forceful style, Guru Nanak sought in his *Japji* to crystallise his highly intellectual and abstract ideas of the Supreme Reality and man’s eternal search after it.

In the words of Archer, ‘this peculiar language with its peculiar alphabet became the Sikhs own classic medium for the transmission of the founder’s gospel, for their sacred scriptures and for their theology.’\*\*

The old Punjabi of the *Japji* often has a veneer of what is called the *sadh bhakha* or *sant bhakha* the language of the saints, which lends a flavour of *Braj bhasha*. ‘It embraced to begin with certain old Hindu elements, many obsolescent *deshi* or ‘local country terms, and some Arabic and Persian words, all of which were subject to Sikh reconstruction, whether by intention or from sheer circumstances a most interesting aspect of linguistics in its religious use of

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\*Teja Singh, *The Japji*, p. 7.

\*\*Archer, *The Sikhs*, p. 109.



terminology ; a new sect, we see, creates its own vocabulary, to a marked degree.'\*

Guru Nanak sought to break himself loose from the magic hold of Sanskrit and to reach the heart of the common man through his own tongue. He preached the people in their language and taught them to have direct communion with God in whatever language they spoke. 'All words that were sincere were sacred.'

But 'the language of the hearth and home is inadequate for the expression of many concepts which must go towards the building of the vision enshrined in the *Japji*. A great number of such concepts were current in the learned and religious circles of the Guru's time and were embodied in Sanskrit words, were current only in their Punjabised forms (usually called the *Apabhramsa*), and it is in this form that they appear not only in the *Japji*, but almost throughout the Guru's writings.'\*\*

The transition of Sanskrit to the *apabhramsa* of the Punjab, followed certain minor changes. Here are some examples : *barama* (Sanskrit *brahma*), *saibhu* (*swayabhu*), *sirathi*, (*srusti*), *varbhandu* (*brahmanda*) etc. Some other examples are abolition or substitution of *ka* as in *loa* (*lok*), *agas*, (*akash*), *vigas* (*vikash*), substitution of Sanskrit *ga* by *ja*, substitution of the *kha* sound for the *sha* of Sanskrit, as in *purkha* (*pursha*) etc. etc.

A clear influence of the *Braj bhasha* can be noticed from the fact that though the use of the prepositions *da*, *de*, *di*, were in vogue in the Punjabi of the time of Guru Nanak, the *Braj* equivalents *ka*, *ke*, *ki*, are invariably used in the Guru's writings.

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\**Ibid.* p 109.

\*\*Sohan Singh, *The Seeker's Path*, p xviii, xxi.

The Guru was himself a great linguist and could take direct account of the different religious writings. He had learnt Persian and Arabic in his boyhood. He had acquaintance with the Sufi saints and Islamic literature. He frequently borrowed some fine and expressive words from the vocabulary of Muslim literature written in Persian or Arabic languages. But these also were used mostly in their Punjabised forms e.g. the words *patshah* (for *badshah*, king), *vakht* (for *vaqat*, time), *kut* (for *quvvat*, force). Besides the absence of the sound of 'q' there is no 'z' sound in old Punjabi ; hence Arabic or Persian words with these sounds appear either with the allied 'j' sound (e.g. *raja* for *raza*) or with *da* substituted for these sounds as in *hadar* (Persian *hazar*), *hadur* (Persian *hazur*) or *kadi* (for *qazi*).

The phoneme *sh* is not noticed in any of the Guru's or contemporary writings. Sanskrit words like *Ishvar*, *aksash* etc. become *isar*, *agas*, and Persian words like *shumar*, *bakhshish* and *shabash* take the form as *sumar*, *bakhsis* and *sabas*. Again, the nasal phonogram is so often not found. For example, for *rahan*, *bannan*, *purian* we find *raha*, *banna* and *puria* etc.

## SYNOPSIS OF THE THOUGHT

There is an Eternal Reality. How to be in tune with that Reality or to see His Vision ? The one Infinite and Eternal God cannot be reached through the deepest meditation or speculative thought, but only through obedience to His Will and a life of self-surrender. He is related to us all as our Creator and Enlightener. His presence in the form of an ever-active Order or Will working in the world-processes is to be realised. Each according to his own ability and light tries to praise Him and express His action and mighty power. The real worship we can offer Him is a ceaseless loving memory



of His goodness. There is no other way of winning His Grace, which is His noblest gift that glorifies our souls. We should never forget that there is a Giver of all things to us all, who is a perfect Enlightener. We should give up the traditional ideas of *Karma* and should hearken to the voice of the Teacher. That would be far better than if we got incredibly long life, titles or fame. The constant brooding on Him destroys all our faults and sorrows, it exalts us to the highest knowledge, wisdom and goodness to the very threshold of divinity. The Guru's teaching will create in us an interest in the wisdom of God as revealed in physical nature. The study of physical knowledge will make us realise the true relation between Matter and Mind. Next we will develop in us the knowledge of what is true, temperate and good and thus acquire a steady vision of life. And then we will attain the highest qualities of manhood in all fields. Steady adherence to His known Will saves us from all evils, keeps us in the right path, and guides us to the highest goal. The first consequence of complete self-surrender to the Divine purposes is that all the senses of the soul receive an awakening. There is no faltering on the path of Righteousness and *Dharma* becomes an inevitable and binding force. We do not think of just our own salvation but start saving others as well. Gradually the seeker becomes the true Representative Man, approved and honoured in the Court of God. All failures in religious sphere have been the result of not recognising the principle that must be good which is pleasing to the Lord. Sin and suffering go on unrestricted because we forget that whatever pleases Him is good and whatever is repugnant to Him is evil. By the exigencies of expression we may be forced to speak of Him in definite terms, but He does not favour any one name or any one place above another. His entire creation is the manifestation of His Name. All created things

in the universe obey God's Will and thus contribute to His glory. The love of God purifies the heart from all sins, though each soul has still to receive the harvest of its own deeds. But to proceed towards perfection and wash ourselves clean of sins, let us not trifle with the terms virtuous and vicious but actively practise the Omnipotent Love. Pilgrimage, austerities and mechanical charities are of no avail. Sincere loyalty to the cause of God is wanted. There can be no worship without good action. He is Truth, Beauty and the eternal yearning of the heart after Goodness. The Master is great and great is His manifestation. Only He Himself knows the secrets of His own work in the countless worlds and His own infinite generosity and greatness ; we cannot fathom them. We can only be thankful to Him for His infinite gifts. Immeasurably great is the gift of Love. Nothing is equal to the ceaseless loving thought of God. God and His righteousness are the most precious of all things. Though we try to utter the Truth we fail utterly, for it is inexpressible. In His glory God sits in the highest Heaven, ruling all the universe and receiving the various adorations of every creature in each of the worlds. All His creation stands praising and singing at the gate of Heaven. All are mortals besides Him, they come and go, but He remains, the eternal changeless One. Adoring ourselves with all virtues and the jewel of self-surrender, let us truly adore Him. We can do nothing of ourselves without His grace. All dispensations, which are not based upon His grace, are false. He gives us grace and then watches how we use it, well or ill. We should only pray for guidance and not try to force it, because by force we can obtain nothing. We have to rise step by step to the highest stage of spirituality. After transcending the physical plane of strife between Right and Wrong which is the domain of Law, the soul ascends through the higher domains of



Reason, Self-exertion and Action and lastly to the highest region of the Truth, the very dwelling of God Himself. The soul gets the experience of variety, beauty and power and lastly of Eternal Truth. He sends His grace to those who work at self-purification through obedience to the Holy Word for which the virtues, such as purity, patience, and love, are needed which are to be hammered out in our daily dealings with others, with constant suffering and sacrifice. Here we have to choose between God and the false petty self, and according to our choice our future state will be a sad wandering in the darkness of ignorance or blissful residence with God. Those who succeed in doing so, their faces glow in the very light of God's own presence.

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## **JAPJI SAHIB**

(Translation by Professor Puran Singh)

—:O:—

He is One. He is the First. He is all that is.

His name is Truth.

He is the Creator of all.

Fearing naught, striking fear in naught ; His Form, on lands  
and waters, is Eternity ; the One Self-existent.

Through the Grace of His true servant, continually repeat  
His Name.

He was in the beginning ; He is through all ages, He shall  
be the One who lives for ever.

### **I**

Beyond thought, no thinking can conceive Him, not even if  
the minds of men should think for ages and ages.

Nor silence can see him, even if the minds of men meditate  
on Him for ages and ages.

( 64 )



Nor can He be known by gaining the worlds : for man's desire is never satiated, even though all the worlds laden with gold fall to his share.

Nor human thoughts can carry man far.

The movements of his mind, the thousand acts of wisdom of the world, leave him dark ; nothing avails.

Vain are the ways of men.

How then to find Him ?

How then to get rid of the dark pall ?

One way there is,—to make His Will our own. No other way, naught else.

## II

Great is His Will !

All manifest things are forms of His Will.

His Will is indefinable !

Of His Will is made all sentient life ;

It is His Will that some are great, some are small.

All existence is bound by His Supreme Will.

Nothing is outside the sphere of His Will ; such is Truth !

Seek His Will,—this is to live.

If one seeks the Universal Will at work, then one can never say, " 'Tis I'".

## III

The bards have chanted hymns in praise of Him, His Power and His Great Gifts, and sung His Signs.

He who builds and unbuilds the Universe,—in whom All Being is, coming forth from Him, and returning back to Him,—seems so far, yet so near ; Omnipresent, Omniscient, Him have ages adored !

Countless millions have sung of Him, yet He still remains, unknown and unsung !

For ages and ages, have men sat at His Feet, for ages and  
 ages they ate from His Hands, for ages and ages they  
 have drunk of His Inspiration, and in such abundance  
 that the vessels could never be enough to hold it all.  
 They are powerless to receive what He gives !  
 By Him are ordained many paths of life ; men and things go  
 whither He wills them to go.  
 And everywhere the Creator smiles in His Glory, in Eternal  
 Repose, Undaunted, Undisturbed, the Infinite, the whole  
 creation's Lord !

#### IV

His *Nam* is that Substance of which all life is made. His  
*Nam* enlarges the heart and makes it limitless.  
 His creatures beg their daily needs from Him,  
 He gives all things to men.  
 Naught is our own ; all is His that we possess, this life and  
 all is His !  
 With what offerings, could we enter His Temple ?  
 With what virtue, His Presence ?  
 What words have we on our lips to win His Delight ?  
 Meditate on His *Nam* at Morn, wet with the ambrosia of the  
 day-break !  
 Our doings make this vesture of our body,  
 The Heaven shall cover our shame with honour, and by the  
 light of His Glance we shall go free.  
 The Dawn of Divine Knowledge cometh from within, and  
 man sees God as the Light Revealing.

#### V

High above all things is the Revealed Infinite, in Himself  
 Self-resplendent, Glorious !



Great are they and honoured of Heaven who serve His Will,  
 He is the Treasure House of all Goodness and Beauty.  
 Sing, ye men, His Greatness !  
 Be wise in Him; believe in Him !  
 Fill your hearts with His Love and His Greatness,  
 Thus ye shall go free of pain and illusion,  
 Thus ye shall be released, gaining the joy of Freedom in  
 Him, who is all-Beatitūde !  
 It is the Master who can implant the seed of Faith in man,  
 the Master is the inspirer of *Hari Nam*.  
 This divine illumination, he achieves in man.  
 Through his Good Will and Love, one sees the presence of  
 God in all things and everywhere.  
 It is the Master's gift, this life of holy inspiration and love  
 of *Nam*,  
 All gods are contained in the Master—*Shiva, Vishnoo,*  
*Brahma*, and the goddesses *Parvati, Lakshmi* and  
*Sarasvati*, and the *Vedas* are in Him and all song : He  
 is the music of the Infinite !  
 The All-Sustainer of souls, the All-Nourisher is But One !  
 Thus has the Master proclaimed.  
 Understand but one fact of all facts—Forget Him not !

## VI

In thy own mind is all, thou hast in it the gems and jewels  
 of thought and virtue of all power, goodness and beauty.  
 But at the feet of the Master, learn one lesson :—Forget not  
 thy Maker, the All-Giver, the All-Sustainer, the  
 Creator !<sup>1</sup>  
 If ye do His Will, it is enough *Tirath*<sup>2</sup> for ye to bathe in holi-  
 ness and joy.

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<sup>1</sup>This is *Simran* ! This is repetition of *Nam* !

<sup>2</sup>Holy rivers and places of pilgrimage.

If ye do not His Will, naught else availeth !

## VII

If a man live *yugas*<sup>1</sup> four, or tens of *yugas* more, have fame spreading all over the nine continents and men to follow him, giving him the praise and renown of the world, Let him be as rich and as great as this, yet without the light of His Glance beaming on him, he is unseen, he is counted but a worm amongst worms ; he shall envy even the fate of sinners !

But wondrous are the ways of the Maker, he makes the disabled able, the able abler.

Great is His All-bestowing Mercy !

He adds unto all out of His Own Stores, no second such as can add unto Him.<sup>2</sup>

## VIII—XI

By thee informed, O Lord, standeth the earth,  
The stars hang in space and sky is above,  
Inspired by Thee are the lower regions, the continents of men, the adepts, guides and gods.

They die not who are thus informed.

Distress and sin to death and dust return.

Thou informest all gods, angels and heavens,

The light of Thy inspiration makes the beggar noble, his raiment worthy of all praise.

Inspiration reveals the secrets of life and self ; and one knoweth all, knowing Thee.

Information of Thee contains All-peace, All-truth, All-knowledge ; all learning is noble thereby,

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<sup>1</sup>Yuga is a cycle of ages.

<sup>2</sup>He is the Infinite Supreme, above all !



The mind of man itself concentrates in Self, attained is the  
Unattainable, the Unknowable is known, the blind finds  
out his path, secure from sin and sorrow.  
Thus bathed in the bliss of holiness, Thy saints are for ever  
as full-blown blossoms of Peace.

## XII—XV

What words can tell the state of those who live in faith and  
trust, who make His Will their own ?  
The Soul mounts high, Reason and mind grow clear ; Fates  
wait with bated breaths,  
They are freed of pain of flesh, of the dreadful grasp of *Yama's*  
Noose, and lost in Self, straight is the path of life for  
them.  
Great is His *Nam*.  
The path of faith, nothing can bar nor mar nor change ; they  
speed to Higher Regions beyond Death and decay, un-  
hindered on, and gain the Seats of Honour hereafter.  
The journey over, the men of faith have reached the goal !!  
Saved are they and their kith and kin.  
Their life gains its freedom of the Infinite.  
No more, desire-pulled, it wanders a-begging.  
They know Thy Will as their own ; together both the Guru  
and the Disciples are saved !  
All Glorious is His *Nam* !  
The door of life opens up to those who have forgone them-  
selves in faith and love.

## XVI

Men whom He appoints and to whom He gives authority are  
the true teachers of men, they guide and lay for man the  
path,

They are honoured of the kingdom of God.

They are the Stars that make this earth a shining spot.

The chosen of God live in the Guru.

Their one fixed *Dhyan*<sup>1</sup> is His Person.

(Their breath is His Breath, their life is His Life. Their mind wanders not, nor their heart strays from the sphere of the Love of the Master !)

The works of the Architect of this Universe are above all reckoning ; they speak foolishly who say they conceive God.

They say this earth is borne on the horns of the Bull.

But there is earth beyond earth, planets on planets beyond, heavy indeed is the load on the horns of the Bull !

It is not the Bull, it is *Dharma*, sprung from Love, who bears the weight of the worlds.

Ah ! who count the countless forms of life with which teems this world below and above, their names or species of hues ?

They are the letters writ by His Flowing Pen ; who now can write, count or reckon that which the Maker has made ?

How fair are forms made by the Creator !

How Mighty Thou ! O Lord !

How enchantingly sweet is Thy emanation !

How great is the kingdom of Nature that Thou hast given to Man !

Thou didst create all this but by one word.

From one word of Thy Lips is made this thousand-rivered Nature !

How shall I praise Thy Miracle of Nature ?

I am filled with the sweetness of its beauty !

At its altar, I fain would lay myself as a sacrifice, but too poor am I to gain my heart's desire, ah ! even but once !!

Thy Will, O Beautiful ! is good.

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<sup>1</sup>Meditation. Subject of meditation.



Thy Pleasure is all !  
O Formless One ! Thou art for ever !

## XVII

How various Thy mankind !!  
Myriads of men in myriad ways of life !  
Some name Thee and some are in pious penance engaged,  
Myriads recite from memory the Holy Books,  
And myriads are lost in deep *Yoga-Samadhi*<sup>1</sup> with their hearts full of sadness for the evanescence of the *Maya*, they are those who have grown indifferent to the world.  
Myriads more are Thy devotees who meditate on Thy Knowledge and Beauty.  
Myriads have taken the vow of Right.  
Generous myriads who take delight in giving themselves and theirs away !  
Myriads are the mighty Heroes Brave who bear the brunt of steel in war with joy,  
Myriads are vowed to Silence with their mind fixed on the Eternal !

## XVIII

And myriads there are who are fools, blind mind and heart, thieves and those that live on plunder.  
Myriads, such as bind their fellow-men by their might.  
Myriads, such as live the life of sin, and spread falsehood, lies and scandals.  
O Infinite, how can I come to know Thy Nature ?  
Intoxicated with its Beauty, I fain would lay myself at its altar as a sacrifice, but too poor to do my heart's desire ah ! even but once !  
Thy Will, O Beautiful, is good !

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<sup>1</sup>Trance of Union.

Thy Pleasure is all !  
O Formless One ! Thou art for ever !  
Beyond the reach of our senses and thought.

### **XIX**

Myriads are Thy world-systems, myriads the spheres, and various are the descriptions that the mighty thinkers give of them.

This world is Thy writing !

This manifested emanation, these objects are the Alphabets of Thy Word,

Through these letters we name Thee, by their aid we praise Thee, by them is all our knowledge of Thee with their aid we sing of Thy Beauty.

Magic are these letters, we write and speak.

These letters are forms of human destiny writ on every man's forehead !

The Forehead of Him who wrote all this is without these lines of form and shape and Fates.

He is free, He can never be writ !!

As He ordaineth so His creatures are !

Great is His Make and great is His Glory !

There is no place where His Glory is not.

Thy Will, O Beautiful ! is good !

Thy Pleasure is all !

O Formless One ! Thou art for ever.

### **XX**

The hands and feet and skin when mud-besmeared are washed free of dirt by water, our vestures when soiled are cleared by washing ;



But when the dirt of sins makes dark our mind naught else  
 but Thy *Nam* can restore to it its fair transparency.  
 It needs be washed with the love of Thy *Nam*, O Lord !  
 The man reaps as he sows.  
 It is His Will, men come and go on the Wheel of Birth and  
 Death.

## XXI

Small indeed is the honour won outside of Self by making pil-  
 grimage and penance, or being kind and giving charity to  
 others, if one has not been within himself and bathed in  
 the Ambrosial River within, if one has not felt Holy Ins-  
 piration within, if the seed of faith is not put in the soil  
 of the heart, if love has yet not sprung !  
 All kinds of Beauty are Thine, O Lord !  
 No beauty whatever I have, how can I aspire to Love Thee  
 if Thou makest me not beautiful of heart and wakest  
 me not to see Thy Beauty everywhere !  
 O Self-Existent, Eternal, Beauty !  
 From Thee has emanated the Holy *Nam*-life !  
 What is the name of the Day and what was the time, what  
 season and what month was it, when Thou first made the  
 world ?  
 The Pundits know naught of the dawn of Thy Creation to re-  
 cord it in the *Puranas*,<sup>1</sup>  
 Nor have the *Qazis*<sup>2</sup> seen that time to put it down in the  
*Quran*,<sup>3</sup>  
 Nor do the Yogis know of that season, hour, date nor the  
 day.

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<sup>1</sup>Sacred books of the Hindus.

<sup>2</sup>Mohammedan Scribes.

<sup>3</sup>The Koran.

That Beautiful Hour when He made this world He Himself  
 alone doth know,  
 Beyond our speech, our praise, our description and knowledge  
 is the Beautiful Maker !  
 Still they speak of Him, each and all according to their mite,  
 as one is wiser than another.  
 He is the Great and the Infinite One ; and great is His *Nam*,  
 What He wills cometh to pass.  
 He knows whatever is.  
 If any one else says he knows Him, he is but a fool in the  
 eyes of the dwellers of higher regions.

## XXII

There are skies above skies and earths below earths and  
 man's mind is tired of this great search,  
 It cannot reach the end of His Vastness.  
 All knowledge of man and his thousand books proclaim but  
 One Truth, that there is but One Substance of which all  
 this is made.  
 There is but One Metal in all. None else ! None else !  
 How can the Infinite be reduced to the Finite ? All attempts  
 to describe Him are lost.  
 The Infinite knows the Infinite.

## XXIII

Ours is to lose ourselves in worship and adoration, nor need  
 we ask, Why ?  
 No need to fathom the Unfathomable : As the rivers flow to  
 the sea with their song, let us flow on to the Infinite,  
 not knowing how wide is the ocean's flood.  
 Like an ocean is the Lord Almighty.



If one has wealth-heaps as high as pyramids,  
 Let him be ever so rich, yet is he less than the little ant,  
     the ant that forgets not its Maker.  
 (The small man that enshrines the Sultan within is all-great.)

#### XXIV

No end to Thee, O Infinite ! nay, those who worship and love-  
     thee have no end ;  
 No end to Thy Forgiveness, endless are Thy Gifts.  
 Thy Vision and Inspiration are infinite and endless is Thy  
     Purpose !!  
 Endless is Thy Creation, we see neither Thy Near nor Thy  
     Far, Thou hast neither this, nor that, shore.  
 For touching either end of Thine, serious minds almost cry  
     with pain,  
 Thy secret is the pang of their souls, but they cannot touch  
     Thy limits at any point.  
 The more we say, the more it grows ; for us the more we-  
     know, the more is our ignorance !  
 Exalted is the Owner of the spheres !  
 Higher than our senses is High abode ;  
 One must gain those heights before one catches a glimpse.  
 It is He whose glance can lift us up, to see Him.  
 His glance is a gift of Heaven.

#### XXV

Abundant is His Mercy, as great as Himself.  
 He giveth and giveth, taketh not even a mustard seed from  
     aught else.  
 The great warriors beg their might from Him and number-  
     less wrecks of sin wait at His Door.  
 There are others who receive His Plenty and eating His Bread.

deny Him ; fools think not on his mysteries.  
 In Thy courtyard die thousands of hunger and of the ills of  
 flesh.  
 O Almighty Giver ! This too is Thy Mercy, this too is Thy  
 Love.  
 By Thy Will the chains of the prisoners drop.  
 The bound are freed and the free are bound, who else could  
 divine Thy Purpose, who else could say aught ?  
 If any dare go against Thy Will, he will know for himself  
 how painful to him is his pride.  
 He knows us all better than we know ourselves.  
 He gives what is best for us ; few are those who believe and  
 bow to this truth.  
 Those on whom He bestows His song are greater than kings,  
 those who have worship in their hearts are nobler by far  
 than the great ones of this earth.  
 (The poet's heart is rich !)

## XXVI

Priceless and precious, Oh Lord, Thy Beauty !  
 How Thy Worth reposes on its infinite glory, in price and in  
 value one and the same !  
 Pricelessly precious are the wares of *Nam*,  
 Thou art the Eternal Merchant !  
 Thy stores are infinite, too precious to be priced !  
 Precious beyond measure is what Thou givest and what  
 Thou takest away, the exchange is pricelessly precious.  
 The rate at which Thou dealest in love is of limitless worth,  
 and how infinitely sweet the hour Thou bestowest love !  
 Thy delicate balance is priceless, Thy weights and weigh-  
 ings !  
 How common and how precious are Thy Signs !  
 Pricelessly precious is the word from Thy Lips,



Pricelessly precious is Thy Forgiveness !

How common and how precious art Thou !

Too common to be felt as preciousness itself, there is no other value ; all descriptions stutter and are lost in a silence which wonders and fixes its gaze on Thee forever.

Though the *Vedas* speak of Him, and the *Puranas*,

Though the learned discourse on Him, and *Indra* and *Brahmas* expound His Law, *Krishna* and His *Gopis* speak of Him, *Shiva* and the adepts tell about God and all the *Buddhas* proclaim Him,

Though millions have spoken thus ; though millions came and sat and left their seats and have gone,

And if there come as many more creations and speak of Him, yet, He shall for ever remain The Undescribed !

And Thou, O Lord, art more than our minds can comprehend !

Thou art as Great as Thou canst be !

Thou art as the Verity, Thou art the One Reality ;  
Thou alone knowest Thyself.

## XXVII

Where art Thou, O Lord ? where is Thy Door ? where is Thy Tower-House from where Thou carest for all, on whose walls breaks the music of the Universe in its Endless Song ?

How many are the instruments !

How countless are the tunes and chants of this World-Music !

How countless are the voices that sing, countless are their undulations !

O Lord ! the winds and waters and fires sing thee : the king of Right and Wrong and his angels ;

*Ishwara* and *Brahma* and the goddesses Thou hast clothed  
with Thy Beauty, sing Thee ;

*Indra* the owner of the three worlds with His Court of gods,  
sings the same chorus !

The silence of the Adepts and Saints sings !

The Heroes of self-control, of patience, of celibacy, of learning,  
are a Song of Thee !

The Seers pass with prophecy along the ages, singing ; and  
the Goddesses, that invest the air, the sky and earth,  
with music of their limbs and eyes, their robes and  
gems, their life and joy, are a Song.

The Holy Lands and Rivers roll in music, the crystal-jewels  
of men roll in thy Song.

The mighty and all-heroic are made of Song.

Thy Kingdoms Four sing Thee !

And Thy past solar systems, Thy planets and their satellites  
whom Thou art holding in Thy Hands, raise the music  
of Thy praise !

Only those whom Thou admittest, can enter into the Song,

Thy poets, divinely led, whose souls are dyed with the red  
dye of Thy Lips, are in Thy Song Eternal !

There is music in music, aye ! music beyond music. Trans-  
cendental is Thy Song !

The same and the same and the Eternally True is My  
Master !

He forever subsists, His *Nam* is True.

He is ; He shall be ; He cannot be thought away, nor doth  
He depart.

He made this world of diverse shapes and colours, fold on  
fold, embryo within embryo, that new to newer grows  
and watches my Lord and His in Glory !

All moves by His Will.

He wills as He wills.



None can undo His will.

My Lord is the King of Kings, the Absolute !

### XXVIII—XXXI

Of what avail are thy ear-rings, O Yogi?<sup>1</sup> better adorn thy mind with peace.

Have no desires pulling at thy heart ; mind not what happens.

Of what use the Yogi's *Jholi* that thou wearest ? Make retirement within the chambers of thy soul thy *Jholi* !

Be self-contained and centred in thy own Self.

This *Bhibut*<sup>2</sup> doth not help thee to forget thy body, make *Dhyan* thy *Bhibut*, by *Dhyan* this body will be that raiment which death can touch not.

Wear, O Yogi, the *Khintha*<sup>3</sup> of new Youth that fades not.

Make Faith thy Staff.

Take the middle path and be patient.

Thou canst not be of *Ai* Sect of *Yoga* by roaming with the so-called Yogis ; but only if thou sharest the goodness in company with the whole world.

The Conquest of the world is but the Conquest of thy Self.

Bow to Him Who is the Beginning of all and Who Himself is without beginning, Primal, the Pure, Immutable, Eternal, Who is the One Life unchanging from age to age !

---

<sup>1</sup>This is evidently addressed to a Yogi of the *Ai* Sect. They bore their ears and put in thick ear-rings of Jade or wood. They have a wallet like a bag of cloth swung round their shoulders in which they keep the alms. They besmear their bodies with ashes. They wear a long gown made of shreds of cloths. They also have a staff.

<sup>2</sup>Ashes besmeared on the body.

<sup>3</sup>The gown of shreds.

Thy Bread be knowledge of God.  
And be kind to all ; there is the same throb of life in all hearts.

All things are strung in the string of one life.  
All powers of the Earth and Heaven are His.  
Things are made and unmade, the Wheel of Creation whirls around this change.

To each one is measured out nor less nor more but what is writ in his own destiny !

Bow to Him Who is the Beginning of all and Who Himself is without beginning—the Pure, the Immutable, the Eternal, Who is the One Life unchanging from age to age !

The three children of *Maya*<sup>1</sup> revolve around the affairs of the world.

One produces, the other nourishes, the third destroys, but these Regents work as He bids them, they move as He commands, He sees them, though they see Him not.<sup>2</sup>

Salute the Beginningless Beginning, the Colourless Purity, the Deathless Verity, the Changing Permanence, which is the same through ages and ages !!

God makes, and sees what He has made.

He is the Lover of Beauty ; the art of God transcends our senses.

No need of sitting in one posture, O Yogi !

The Fair God is everywhere !

He feedeth us in all the spheres ; allotted to us is our share, even before our birth !

<sup>1</sup>It evidently refers to three dynamic principles that keep creation going.

<sup>2</sup>The idea is quite clear, that the three principles of *Maya* are all of the objective, while God is the subject, the Absolute.



Salute the Beginningless Beginning, the Colourless Purity,  
the Deathless Verity, the Changing Permanence, which  
is the same through ages and ages ! !

### XXXII

If one tongue of man were as myriads, these myriads made  
myriads more again ; and if one single utterance were  
as if a wheel of sound—whose echoes again a myriad  
had moved,—reverberated through the leaves of the  
forest and blades of grass, so that the sacred sound  
bound with its spell all nature with its countless  
threats and voices,

With such a tongue and with such a sound when Man says  
Hail, Lord !

Each pore of his skin sending forth a strain with the music  
of his *Nam*.

Then is the man at one with his Maker, then Man mounts  
high, and is one with God ; there is no other way !

We have heard the whispers of gods on high ; the worm of  
the earth begins to vie with those whose souls are lit by  
the glances of God, who beam with Beatitude  
Eternal !!

The Man plays the fool in thinking so much of himself.

What are his resolves, his ideas and efforts, labour and  
pain ?

Are not his deeds as fates combined against him ?

Is not his past self his own undoer ?

No way of escape from the wheel of birth and death but His  
Saving Mercy, His Grace and Glance !

### XXXIII

O Lord ! throw me not on myself, of my will I can nor  
speak nor observe silence.

Throw me not on my own strength ; of my will I can nor  
pray nor give myself to Thee !

Nor I can follow life nor even death !

Not by my own power can I a beggar be, or a king : throw  
me not on myself, for by myself I can nor gain my soul  
nor the knowledge of Thyself.

Throw me not on myself, for I am unable to cross the Sea  
of change.

I cannot, O Lord !

Let him who has strength in his arms try, but man is weak  
man for all that.

All men are the same, nor more nor less, when seen from  
the Eternal.

### XXXIV

Day and night He made.

He made the seasons, He made the winds and waters and  
fires and nether regions.

In mid-air is put this earth and held firm ; this is the land  
of Duty.

It is the temple of God.

This earth is flower-dyed with diverse species of life, the  
earth teems with their infinitude,

As we do here, so shall we be judged,

The Court of God separates chaff from wheat, there shall be  
measured unto us our raw and ripe.

Each man shall stand alone ; his own deeds shall avail  
after the life of this earth.



**XXXV**

Honour is there for the Chosen of God and they shall be received by Him with kindness and love and He shall look at them. Such is the way of the *Dharma-khand*, the Region of Action<sup>1</sup>.

The Spirit of Judgment rules over the Realm of Action !  
Great God is merciful !

But the way of the Region of the Mind<sup>2</sup> is another.

The Spirit of Divine Knowledge reigns here !

In the mind roll winds and waters and fires,

In the mind are *Krishnas*, *Shivas*, *Brahmas* by thousands and  
an endless variety of name and form and dress.

And in it are contained thousand Regions of Duty, countless  
stars, moons and suns.

In it are countless Heavens, and countless again are the countries and lands and homes.

In it are adepts, *Buddhas*, Yogis, gods and demons.

In it are saints.

In the mind surge the seas, and in it are jewels and precious  
gems.

In it are the sources of life, and in it are countless languages  
and countless lines of Kings.

In it are the Masters of the Divine Knowledge and in it are  
those who worship.

There is the Infinite in the Infinite !!

**XXXVI**

The Region of Mind is lit with God's light.

The music is endless, there is bliss untold.

---

<sup>1</sup>The reference is to the Realm of Limitation where the embodied souls have to work out their destiny—The *Jiva Srishti*—The man-world.

<sup>2</sup>This is the Region of Liberation—*Ishwar Srishti*, the God-world.

Then comes the higher Realm of Ecstasy

There is the holy Rapture, here is naught but Beauty.

Here are the Titans at work, making idols of beauty, and  
here in this Realm of Ecstasy are made intellect and  
understanding, wisdom and power of men and gods.  
Beyond all words in this Sphere of Ecstasy as subtle as a  
Trance.

Its reigning Deity is Beauty !!

Higher than the Region of Ecstasy is the Realm of Grace.

The Gods of power rule over this Realm,—

Great masters who lift man by force as he toils to it through  
the three other Realms of Duty, Knowledge and Ecstasy.

### XXXVII

Incomparable, the dwellers of the Realm of Grace ;

They are mighty heroes full of God's Power !

One understandeth only when he sees this Realm, no word-  
paintings can picture it for us.

Here are many Queens as *Sitas* in Glory, whose beauty is:  
what no one can tell another who hath seen it not.

Nor death nor delusion is for them any more, in whose heart  
He liveth !

Here are congregations of saints in bliss, whose minds and  
hearts are inebriate with God.

Higher than all is the Realm of My Lord,—

The Realm Absolute ! here reigns The Formless One !

Here His glance is my soul's Beatitude !

In this Realm are contained all Regions, and all the starry  
Heavens without end !

Out of the Formless Infinite come the forms and finite beings,  
never hasting, never resting.

They whom He seeth, on whom He raineth the Light of His.  
Smiles and pours the showers of the Life Eternal,



They on whom God bestows His Grace and Glance and whom  
the Kind One by one glance maketh happy, toil hard at  
their craft as smiths :

### XXXVIII

Chastity of thought and speech and deed is their Furnace,  
Understanding is the Anvil on which they ply their craft  
through the world of self and woe.

Divine Wisdom serves as tools for those toilers at life !  
The devout awe of the Presence of God, and reverence serve  
them as bellows, and sufferings of vow of poverty as fire ;  
They make the Heart of Love the vessel in which melts the  
Gold of *Nam* and thus they cast and recast their being  
in Love.

True is this Mint where Man is cast in the Image of God,  
where Man is the Word and the Word is Man :

On such as these, He showers His Grace !

### SLOKA

BORN of the waters, we children of great Earth learn our les-  
sons from the winds,

And we spin in the arms of Day and Night ; they nurse us  
well.

Before the Great Judge will be read out our Actions, good or  
bad.

By our own Actions we shall be nearer Him or farther off !

Those who fix their *Dhyan* on *Nam* shall pass above the pain  
of labour.

Their task is done.

Bright are their faces !

And in joy of one liberated soul shall many more be, through  
His great Love, made free !

— : o : —

**SOME SELECTED HYMNS OF GURU NANAK**

\*As men have heard so all call Thee great ;  
 But hath any one ever seen how great Thou art ?  
 Thy worth cannot be estimated or described ;  
 They who seek to describe it, are absorbed in Thee.  
 O my great Lord, deep and profound, brimful of excellences.  
 None knoweth the extent of Thine outline.  
 Though all meditative men were to meet and meditate upon Thee,  
 Though all appraisers were to meet and appraise Thee—  
 They who possess divine and spiritual wisdom, priests and high priests—  
 Yet they could not describe even a small portion of Thy greatness.  
 All truth, all fervour, all goodness,  
 The excellences of perfect men,  
 Cannot be obtained in their perfection without Thee.  
 If Thy grace be obtained, none can be excluded ;  
 Of what account is the helpless speaker ?  
 Thy storerooms are filled with Thy praises.  
 Who can prevail against him to whom Thou givest ?  
 Nanak, the True One arrangeth all.

(The Rahiras, Rag Asā, page 9.)



\*If I repeat the Name, I live ; if I forget it, I die;  
 It is difficult to repeat the true Name.  
 If man hunger after the true Name,  
 His pain shall depart when he satisfieth himself with it.  
 Then how could I forget it, O my mother ?  
 True is the Lord, true is His Name.  
 Men have grown weary of uttering  
 Even an iota of His greatness ; His worth they have not  
 discovered.  
 If all men joined and tried to describe Him,  
 That would not add to or detract from His greatness.  
 God dieth not, neither is there any mourning for Him ;  
 He continueth to give us our daily bread which never  
 faileth.  
 His praise is—that there neither is,  
 Nor was, nor shall be anyone *like unto* Him.  
 As great as Thou art Thyself, O God, so great are Thy  
 gifts.  
 Then who madest the day madest also the night.  
 They who forget their Spouse, are evil persons :  
 Nanak, without His name, they are naught.

(The Rahiras, Rag Asa, page 9.)

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ਆਖਾ ਜੀਵਾ ਵਿਸਰੈ ਮਰਿ ਜਾਉ : : : : : Translator M. A. Macauliffe.

\*In the house in which God's praise is sung and He is meditated on,

Sing the Sohila and remember the creator.

Sing the Sohila of my Fearless Lord ; I am a sacrifice to that song of joy by which everlasting comfort is obtained.

Ever and ever living things are watched over ; the Giver regardeth *their wants*.

When *even* Thy gifts cannot be appraised, who can appraise the Giver ?

The year and the auspicious time *for marriage* are recorded, *relations* meet and pour oil on me the bride.

O my friends, pray for me that I may meet my Lord.

This message is ever sent to every house ; such invitations are ever issued.

Remember the Caller ; Nanak, the day is approaching.

(The Sohila, Rag Gauri Dipaki, page 12. )



\*If my palace were raised of jewels and inlaid with  
rubies,  
And pleasantly plastered with musk and suffron and  
sandal-paste,  
Would then I lose myself and forget the Lord's Name ?  
(1)

Let my body and soul burn without Thee.  
There is no abode else for me but Thine, O Lord !  
(1—*Pause*)

If the earth were to be of diamonds,  
And my bedstead were strung with rubies.  
And the dancing houri, her face sparkling like the shin-  
ing bead, invited me with her gestures tender.  
Would then I lose myself and forget the Lord's Name  
(2)

If I were an ascetic centred on the Self,  
And possessed the power to perform miracles,  
And could assume now subtle, now manifest, body,  
And people had faith in me for that,  
Would then I lose my head and forget Thy Name ? (3)

Even if I were a king, a gatherer of armies, and my seat  
were on a throne,  
And I commanded people about and about,  
O, all that would be vain,  
If I forget Thee, O my Loved Lord ! (4—1)

(Sri Rag, page 14.)

1. \*Whatever is seen or heard is in the order of Nature ;  
so is the consciousness of fear and comfort.  
The nether regions, the heavens, and all the forms  
in creation come in the course of Nature ;  
So did the Vedas, the Puranas, the Western Books, and  
all the ways of thought,  
And all the ways of eating, drinking, dressing, and all  
the ways of love.  
... Nature prevails in the animal kingdom, its species,  
genera, and colours.  
Nature works in the virtues and evils of men in their  
feelings of honour and dishonour.  
Nature works in the air, the water, the fire, and the dust  
of the earth.  
Thy Nature works everywhere ; Thou art the Master of  
Nature, Thou the Creator, Thy Name is the holiest  
of the holy.  
Says Nanak, God looks to everything with His will, and  
works most intelligently.

(Asa di Var, page 464)



\*A literate man who sins will not be spared.

Nor will a good man be punished because he is illiterate.

A man is known by the work he does.

We should not play such game as to fail in the court of God.

The literate and the illiterate shall be judged by their good sense.

It is the wayward who shall be punished in hereafter.

(Asa-di-Var, page 469.)

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\*ਪੜਿਆ ਹੋਵੇ ਗੁਨਹਗਾਰੁ ਤਾ.....ਪਉੜੀ ੧੨.

Translator Teja Singh

\*In words we are good, but in deeds bad.

Within mind we are impure and black, but white from without.

We stand in competition with those who stand and serve at Lord's door.

• They are imbued with the love of their Bridegroom and enjoy the pleasure of His dalliance.

They remain powerless even when possessing power and are ever humble.

Nanak, our lives become profitable if we associate with (such brides) or them.

(Sri Rag, Page 85)



\*The treasure of the Name-Nectar, for the sake of which thou comest into the world ; that Nectar is with the Guru.

Give up garbs, disguises and cleverness. In duality this fruit is obtained not.

O my soul, remain steady and wander not any where.

Searching abroad thou shalt suffer much pain. The Nectar is in thy heart at home.

Forsake sins and pursue virtues. Thou shalt regret the commission of sins.

Thou knowest not the distinction between good and evil and again and again sinkest thou in the mire of sins.

Within thee is the great filth of greed and falsehood. What for wastest thou thy outside ?

Ever utter thou the immaculate Name, under Guru's instruction. Then alone shall thy innerself be emancipated.

Abandon greed and slander and forswear falsehood. By Guru's instruction, thou shalt obtain the true fruit.

As Thou pleasest so do Thou preserve me. O reverend! God. Slave Nanak sings the praise of Thy Name.

(—Sorth, Page 598)

\*First, God Created His Light : and from its Power were  
all men made :

Yea, from God's Light came the whole universe :  
so, whom shall we call good, whom bad. [1]

O men, be not strayed by doubt,  
For, the Creator is in the Created, and the Created in  
the Creator, who Filleth all, all over. [1—*Pause*]

The clay is the same, but fashioned in a myriad shapes :  
So, it availeth not to find fault either with the clay-  
vessels, or with the Potter, who Mouldeth them,  
each in a different way. [2]

Yea, the One True God is within all,  
And it is He alone who Createth all,  
And whosoever Realiseth His Will, knoweth the One  
alone : yea, he alone is the Servant of God. [3]

(Parbhati page 1349)

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\*ਅਵਲਿ ਅਲਹ ਨੂਰੁ ਉਪਾਇਆ.....ਪ੍ਰਭਾਤੀ ਕਬੀਰ ਜੀ,

Translator Gopal Singh



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